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Abstract

Calvinism and the arts: A re-assessment

Although many believe John Calvin had a negative attitude towards the arts, particularly visual art, my contention is that we find within his writings and the development of the Reformed tradition a more positive attitude to the arts than has hitherto been recognized.

In chapters one and two, I look in detail at Calvin's own writings. I begin by examining exactly what type of visual art he rejected and what type he affirmed. I then look at how his eschatology and epistemology, particularly his use of the metaphor of mirror, allow us to argue for the placing of certain types of art within Reformed churches, notably history and landscape paintings.

In chapters three and four, I consider music and architecture within Calvin's writings and the Reformed tradition. I suggest that the respective ontologies of metrical psalms and Reformed church-buildings both share something with those of history and landscape paintings and that it is inconsistent to allow for the former, but reject the latter.

In the last three chapters, I focus on visual art. I examine the development of decoration and forms of visual art such as stained-glass windows in selected Reformed churches and suggest that it naturally follows that history and landscape paintings should be allowed for in such churches. I look at examples of these from seventeenth-century Netherlands, when Calvinism was the pre-dominant mode of religious expression, and argue that their form and content provide us with ontological and epistemological arguments which inevitably lead to the conclusion that their continued exclusion from Reformed churches is no longer tenable.

In short, the use of appropriate works of art in Reformed churches is wholly consistent with the fundamental notions underpinning Calvin's theology and liturgical practices in the Reformed tradition, and their continued exclusion from most of these churches is an anomaly.

(300 words)

Calvinism and the arts: A re-assessment

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I hereby declare that no material in this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university and that this thesis is solely the work of myself, Christopher Richard Joby.

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Introduction

There has been a growing interest amongst theologians in recent years in the arts, particularly the visual arts. What some may find surprising is that much of this interest either comes from within the Reformed tradition, or considers the relationship between this tradition and the visual arts¹. Although the tradition is a diverse one, which over time has been subject to a wide variety of influences, there is no doubt that the most important figure in its development is John Calvin (1509-1564).

Calvin's influence on the tradition is clear. At the time of the Reformation, his relationship with figures such as John Knox, meant that his ideas spread far beyond the walls of Geneva. And during the history of the Reformed movement up to and including modern times, creedal statements such as the Heidelberg Catechism have been shaped by his thought.

During the history of the Reformed movement, there is no doubt that there has been much opposition to the use of visual art, particularly within church buildings, and some of the responsibility for this must lie with Calvin himself. However, in the last one hundred years or so, several groups of commentators from within the tradition have tried to argue for a more positive estimation of visual art than has hitherto been the case. One such group is the so-called Dutch neo-Calvinists, who include amongst their number Abraham Kuyper, Herman Bavinck, Hans Rookmaaker and Calvin Seerveld².

However, typically these commentators only rarely address what Calvin himself wrote on

¹ A seminal work in this regard is the collection of essays: Paul Corby Finney (ed.), *Seeing Beyond the Word: Visual Arts and the Calvinist Tradition* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1999).

² For a fine introduction to the ideas of the Dutch neo-Calvinists, see: Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991).

questions of images and visual art in general, preferring rather to engage with other resources such as those of philosophy.

Other commentators, notably the French writers Léon Wencelius and Jérôme Cottin, do engage with Calvin's writing in their attempts to develop an aesthetic consonant with Reformed thought³. However, I suggest that neither of these is sufficiently critical of Calvin's writings, and also that they do not consider developments in the attitude towards visual art, as well as other forms of art, in the history of the Reformed tradition.

In my approach to arguing for a more positive attitude towards visual art in this tradition, I, like Wencelius and Cottin, engage with Calvin's thought, but unlike them, am more critical of it, particularly that part of it which relates to the use of images. I also take seriously developments over time in the relationship between Reformed communities and the arts.

I begin with a detailed analysis of exactly what Calvin said about the visual arts, reflecting both on what he did write as opposed to what it is commonly believed he wrote, and also on his use of sources, as I believe insufficient attention has been paid to this up to now.

Having done this, I then ask whether there are other aspects of Calvin's thought which might allow us to argue for a more positive assessment of visual art. Here, I suggest that his epistemology, eschatology, understanding of music and ontology of church all provide

³ Léon Wencelius, *L'esthétique de Calvin* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1979), and Jérôme Cottin, *Le Regard et la Parole: Une théologie protestante de l'image* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994).

us with the opportunity to argue more strongly in favour of visual art. What I also argue is that if Calvin had been consistent in his application of these aspects of his thought, as well as others such as his affirmation of God's transcendence, then he might have recognized that his attitude towards certain works of visual art was anomalous.

But, as well as considering Calvin's own thought, I also look at developments within the Reformed tradition in a variety of countries. What we find here is that, over time, Reformed communities have slowly adapted themselves to the arts. We see, for example, more diverse forms of musical expression, the ornate decoration of pulpits, organs and stained-glass windows and even some instances of depictions of Christ⁴, something which Calvin himself strongly opposed. This leads us to reflect on whether the modern understanding of visual art is the same as that which informed Calvin and his fellow Reformers. I argue that it is not, and suggest that if we consider works of visual art, such as history and landscape paintings, as sets of symbols which *allude* to realities beyond themselves, then it would be more acceptable to place them in churches in the Reformed tradition.

However, I recognize, and state regularly throughout what follows, that the ontology of a work of visual art depends to some extent on the viewer. Interestingly, Calvin himself seems to have recognized this⁵, but rather than follow it through, and trust the faithful not

⁴ See Chapters Four, Five and Six for various examples of these and Chapter Six especially where I examine in detail the basis of Calvin's opposition to depictions of Christ in visual art.

⁵ Calvin suggests that there is an innate longing in us to re-establish our pre-lapsarian relationship with God. He calls this the *semen religionis* ('seed of religion'), and it is this that for Calvin leads us to try and find God in material objects such as religious images. I discuss this more fully in Chapter One, in the section entitled 'Human desire'.

to worship works of visual art, he argued that all of them should be removed from churches. I have more hope for mankind, and suggest that, if we remember that works of visual art are ontologically distinct from that to which they allude, then they can be a means of sanctifying the elect and making the world a more beautiful place.

Chapter One: Calvin and art. A detailed analysis of exactly what type of visual art Calvin opposed and what he affirmed

Introduction

There is a widely-held belief that the Reformer John Calvin was hostile to the arts in general and visual art in particular¹. In this chapter, I will look in detail at exactly what Calvin wrote on this subject in order to assess the validity of this belief. I begin by considering exactly what practices in relation to visual art Calvin opposed and why he opposed them. Interestingly, we will see here that, contrary to what many may think, Calvin was by no means opposed to all visual art. This, I go on to suggest, allows us to argue that certain types of art, in particular history and landscape paintings, do have a place in churches in the Reformed tradition. Finally, I address the fact that although Calvin did not oppose all works of visual art, he did argue against the use of any of them in churches. I will look in detail at the arguments he uses in this regard and suggest that each of them is flawed and that they thus do not provide sufficient reason for the exclusion of appropriate works of visual art from churches in the Reformed tradition.

However, we should begin by acknowledging that the belief that Calvin was in some sense opposed to visual art is not without foundation. For example, in 1540 he wrote in a letter to an unknown young student,

Those who seek in scholarship nothing more than an honoured occupation

¹ It is this view that commentators such as P. W. Buys and more famously Abraham Kuyper set about trying to refute. See: P.W. Buys, 'Calvin and Art' in: Richard C. Gamble (ed.), *Calvin's Thought on Economic and Social Issues and the Relationship of Church and State* (London: Garland Publishing, 1992), pp. 207-219, at p. 217 (originally published in *Calvinus Reformatore* (1982), pp. 287-99), and Peter S. Heslam, *Creating a Christian Worldview: Abraham Kuyper's Lectures on Calvinism* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 1998), p. 210. For Kuyper's original Stone Lectures, including the fifth lecture entitled 'Calvinism and Art', see: Abraham Kuyper, *Lectures on Calvinism: The Stone Foundation Lectures* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1931).



*with which to beguile the tedium of idleness I would compare to those who pass their lives looking at paintings*².

And it is clear from several other passages in Calvin's writings that he did oppose certain types of visual art, particularly the religious image³. But, before we go on, it is important for the reader to be clear about what I mean when I use the word 'image' in this discussion, for it seems that different commentators use it in different ways. For example, whereas art historians tend to use the word 'image' to talk of visual works of art in general, for theologians the word is loaded to a greater or lesser extent with the idea of relationship to the divine. That said, when we consider how Calvin himself uses the word *imago*, which is often translated as 'image', we see that he uses it in a sense that is much broader than that which we find in the work of others who are concerned with theological aesthetics⁴. Admittedly, in the first instance, he does use it to describe works that bespeak a relationship with God, and we should note that it is these works that he expressly rejects. However, he also uses the word *imago* to describe certain works that he considers are merely for pleasure. He says that these works depict people, animals, and town and country scenes⁵, but the extent to which he ascribes a religious dimension to works such as these is not clear. Thirdly, for Calvin *imago* includes works such as histories which he admits do in fact have some

² Latin: *Eos enim qui nihil aliud in literis quaerunt nisi ut honesta aliqua occupatione otii taedium fallant, comparare iis soleo qui picturis contemplandis tota vita detinentur*. See: *Corpus Reformationum* (henceforth CR), Vol. XXXIX, *Ioannis Calvini opera quae supersunt omnia* (henceforth CO), Vol. XI, W. Baum, E. Cunitz, and E. Reuss (eds.) (Brunswick and Berlin: 1863-1900), pp. 56-7.

³ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, John T. McNeill (ed.), Ford Lewis Battles (trans.), (London: SCM Press, 1961), (henceforth *Institutes*) I, xi, 12 and 13, and *The Geneva Catechism* in: CR XXXIV, CO VI, pp. 55-6. For an English translation of this section of *The Geneva Catechism*, see: John Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, J. K. S. Reid (trans. and ed.) (London: SCM Press, 1954), p. 109.

⁴ This may reflect what some see as a lack of visual hermeneutic in Calvin's writings. See, for example: Jérôme Cottin, *Le Regard et la Parole: Une théologie protestante de l'image* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994), p. 287.

⁵ Jean Calvin, *Institution de la Religion Chrestienne, Livre Premier*, Jean-Daniel Benoit (ed.) (Paris: J. Vrin, 1957), p. 135.

epistemological value in teaching and admonishing⁶. Again, the extent to which Calvin considered that these works had a religious value is not clear. But perhaps this lack of clarity leads us to reflect on the fact that whether or not some works of art might be considered to have a relationship to the divine depends not only on their subject matter but also on the viewer's response to these works. For example, we may see a triptych in an art gallery today primarily as a work of art to be valued for its aesthetic excellence, whereas originally it might have been used in a church as a means by which worshippers could engage with God. This shows us the difficulty in using certain terms for particular groups of artworks in our discussion. However, to facilitate the reader's task, I shall apply the terms 'image' and 'religious image' to those works whose subject and purpose were clearly seen as religious in Calvin's time, and use terms such as 'visual art' and 'works of visual art' to speak of paintings and sculptures more generally. However, as I discuss in more detail later in this chapter⁷, the reader should always bear in mind that there will be times when a work of art might be used in order to relate to the divine even when the subject is not explicitly religious and the artist did not intend to produce the work for such a purpose⁸.

So with this in mind let us re-iterate that Calvin did oppose the use of most works that we may see as religious images, but also remember that he was by no means against all forms of visual art. Indeed, he wrote that sculpture and painting are gifts from

⁶ *Institutes* I, xi, 12 and I, xi, 13.

⁷ See the discussion regarding Huldreich Zwingli's attitude to two works of art depicting Charlemagne later in this chapter.

⁸ See also Chapter Three, where I discuss Hans Belting's distinction between the era of the image and the era of art.

God⁹. In particular, as I have just noted, he did see that history paintings have some value in teaching and admonishing¹⁰, and, as I will discuss later in this chapter, there is room within his thought to argue that he would also have been in favour of what we now understand as landscape painting¹¹.

However, I begin by considering those practices that Calvin consistently argued against in relation to visual art. This will allow us to understand not only what he opposed but also what he allowed for.

The visual representation of God and the worship of religious images

In particular, Calvin opposed two practices in relation to religious images. Both of these derive from his reading of Exodus 20: 4-6, which he considered formed the second commandment¹². The first of these practices is the erection of any image for the purpose of representing God and the second is the worshipping of this or any other type of image¹³.

He makes these two points in several of his writings. For example, in a passage in *Institutes*, which first appears in the 1543 Latin edition and then in all subsequent

⁹ *Institutes* I, xi, 12.

¹⁰ Calvin affirms history painting in *Institutes* I, xi, 12. In an article on Calvin's attitude to art, Diane Apostolos-Cappadona writes, '[Calvin] prohibited depictions of God and of any event, scriptural or theological, that was not historical'. (Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, 'Calvinism', in: Jane Turner (ed.), *The Dictionary of Art, Vol. 5, Bruggen, ter to Casson* (London: Macmillan, 1996), pp. 445-7, at p. 447). Although Apostolos-Cappadona is correct regarding depictions of God, I believe she goes too far in the second half of this statement. A close reading of *Institutes* I, xi, 12 tells us that Calvin did not so much prohibit paintings that were not histories, as see no value in them.

¹¹ I will examine this point in more detail when I discuss landscape painting below (see pp. 24-7 below).

¹² For a comparison of Calvin's division of the first and second commandments with that of other Reformers, see: Margarete Stirm, *Die Bilderfrage in der Reformation* (Heidelberg: Verein für Reformationsgeschichte, 1977), p. 238. It is interesting to note, as James Payton Jr. does, that whereas Calvin interprets the fourth commandment, concerning the Sabbath, in the light of the coming of Christ, he does not do this with the second commandment. See: James Payton Jr., 'Calvin and the Legitimation of Icons: His Treatment of the Seventh Ecumenical Council', in: *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte* 84 (1993), pp. 222-241, at pp. 228-9, and Chapter Six where I discuss this in more detail.

¹³ Carlos Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (Cambridge: CUP, 1989), p. 226.

Latin editions, he writes,

We believe it wrong that God should be represented by a visible appearance, because he himself has forbidden it [Ex. 20: 4].

A few sentences later, he writes,

If it is not right to represent God by a physical likeness, much less will we be allowed to worship it as God, or God in it¹⁴.

In another important work, the *Geneva Catechism*, written slightly later than this passage from *Institutes*, Calvin again makes his priorities clear¹⁵. The Catechism takes the form of a putative series of questions asked by a Master followed by model responses given by a Catechumen. One section deals with each commandment in turn. In the passage relating to the second commandment, the Master asks,

Does [the second commandment] prohibit us entirely from painting anything or sculpting images?

The Catechumen responds,

No; but it does forbid these two things; that we make images either for representing God or for worshipping him¹⁶.

He makes the same points again in a refutation of arguments in favour of the use of

¹⁴ *Institutes*, I, xi, 12. Latin: *Deum effingi visibili specie nefas esse putamus, quia id vetuit ipse...si ne figurare quidem Deo corpoream effigiem fas est, multo minus ipsam pro Deo, vel Deum in ipsa colere licebit* (CR XXX, CO II, p. 83). In the 1545 French language edition of *Institutes*, and all subsequent French editions of the work, Calvin included a similar statement, *Je n'estime pas qu'il soit licite de représenter Dieu sous forme visible, pource qu'il a defendu de ce faire...S'il n'est point licite de figurer Dieu par effigie corporelle, tant moins sera-il permis d'adorer une image pour [Dieu], ou d'adorer Dieu en icelle* (CR XXXI, CO III, pp. 135-6). (My translation).

¹⁵ The *Geneva Catechism* was published in 1545.

¹⁶ Latin: *M: Prohibetne in totum, ne aliquae pingantur aut sculpantur imagines? C: Non, sed duo tantum hic vetat, ne quas faciamus imagines, vel Dei effingendi, vel adorandi causa.* French: *M: Veut-il du tout defendre de faire aucune image? C: Non: mais il defend de faire aucune image, ou pour figurer Dieu, ou pour adorer.* (CR XXXIV, CO VI, pp. 55-6).

images in worship in 1562¹⁷, and, as one might expect, re-iterates them in his exegesis of Exodus 20: 4-6 in his *Commentaries on The Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, published in Latin in 1563 and in French in 1564¹⁸.

Here he writes,

...there are two parts in the Commandment – the first forbids the erection of a graven image, or any likeness; the second prohibits the transferring of the worship which God claims for Himself alone, to any of these phantoms or delusive shows¹⁹.

So, it would seem that Calvin is clear and consistent in defining what practices relating to images he opposes. It also seems that he believed these practices were widespread in the church. In a moment, I will look at the theological grounds on which Calvin opposed these practices. But before I do this, it is briefly worth considering here the background to his opposition, and that of other Reformers, to these practices by looking at what was happening in late-medieval piety in Western Europe.

Here, it seems that there is a range of opinion as to what practices were in fact taking place and that the nature of the practices themselves did vary significantly. Some argued that people were honouring images, but reserving worship for God alone²⁰.

¹⁷ The identity of the addressee of the 1562 refutation is not known. However, Calvin seems to be dealing directly with a series of arguments which support the use of images in worship. See: John Calvin, 'De Cultu Imaginum' in: *CR XXXVIII, CO X*, pp. 193-202, at p. 193.

¹⁸ W. de Greef, *The Writings of John Calvin: An Introductory Guide*, Lyle D. Bierma (trans.) (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1993), pp. 105-6.

¹⁹ Latin: *Iam tenendum est duas esse mandati partes: priore vetat erigi sculptile, aut ullam similitudinem: altera autem cultum quem sibi uni-asserit Deus, transferri prohibet ad spectra illa, vel fallaces pompas.* (*CR LII, CO XXIV*, p. 377). English translation in: John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony, Vol. II*, C. W. Bingham (trans. and ed.) (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1853), p. 108.

²⁰ One such commentator is John Cochlaeus, who wrote a response to Calvin's *Treaty on Relics* (referred to in this chapter as *An Inventory of Relics*) entitled *De sacris reliquis Christi et sanctorum*

This was a distinction that Calvin himself rejected²¹. One figure in the Reformation who believed that people were actually worshipping images was Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt. This should not surprise us, as Karlstadt was one of the earliest and most fervent iconoclasts of the Reformation period²². However, another person who recognized that the use of images in worship needed to be reformed was Hieronymus Emser, not a fervent iconoclast, but a Catholic theologian. Emser responded to Karlstadt's iconoclastic treatise *On the Removal of Images* on a point by point basis in his work, *That One Should Not Remove Images*. However, he did admit that some worshippers had become so transfixed by the beauty of the images they were using that they forgot to look beyond them to God²³. But, even before the Reformation, some were warning of the dangers of worshipping images instead of God, and tracts were issued to this effect. For example, in *Die hymel strasz* ('The Road to Heaven'), written in the 1460s and printed in Augsburg in 1484, Stephan von Landskron warns,

...it is against the Commandment to worship carved, engraved, painted or other images, either for their own sake or for them to give one assistance... We should only be reminded by images to think of our Lord...²⁴

In reality, it seems that a wide range of practices were probably taking place at this time, including the use of images merely as aids to devotion²⁵. But, it does seem that

eius in 1549. See: *Institutes* I, xi, 11, n. 21.

²¹ *Institutes* I, xi, 11.

²² Bryan D. Mangrum and Giuseppe Scavizzi (trans. and eds.), *A Reformation Debate: Karlstadt, Emser, and Eck on Sacred Images: Three Treatises in Translation* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 1991), p. 7.

²³ *ibid.*, p. 86.

²⁴ Michael Baxandall, *The Limewood Sculptors of Renaissance Germany* (London: Yale University Press, 1980), p. 53.

²⁵ Baxandall, *op. cit.*, p. 60.

amongst these practices was the worship of images and that this view was not merely held by fervent Reformers such as Karlstadt and Calvin. However, what is perhaps most important in this context is that Calvin *believed* that people were worshipping images²⁶. Given this, we now need to look at the reasons, which are primarily theological, that he used to argue that this practice should stop.

Calvin's reasons for his injunctions against images

The first and most important reason Calvin gave for his injunctions against the setting up of images representing God and the giving of honour due to God to these or other images is that such practices would impair God's glory. In *Institutes* he argues that God should not be represented in images as 'it cannot be done without some defacing of his glory'²⁷. In his commentary on Exodus 20: 4-6, he writes that in making the prohibitions of the second commandment, Moses had no other object than to 'rescue God's glory from all the imaginations which tend to corrupt it'²⁸. A similar idea is expressed in the *Geneva Catechism*. Here, the putative conversation between the Master and Catechumen runs as follows,

Master: You think...that injury is done to [God's] majesty when he is represented in [visible shape]?

*Catechumen: I think so*²⁹.

²⁶ It is worth noting here, though, that in the first instance for Calvin it is not the image as such that is worshipped, but the god represented by the image. However, in practice, there is no difference whether someone simply worships an image, or God in the image, for as soon as representations of God are made, people ascribe his power to these images, and, in the mind of the worshipper, God and the image become one. See Garrett Green, *Imagining God: Theology and the Religious Imagination* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1989), p. 96.

²⁷ Latin: *fieri sine aliqua gloriae eius deformatione non potest* (CR XXX, CO II, p. 83). *Institutes* I, xi, 12.

²⁸ John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, Vol. II, C. W. Bingham (trans. and ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 108.

²⁹ Latin: *M: Iniuriam ergo fieri censes eius maiestati, quum in hunc modum repraesentatur?*, C: *Sic sentio*. French: *M: Tu entens donc que c'est faire deshonneur à sa Maiesté, de la vouloir représenter*

We need to ask what exactly Calvin means when he uses the terms ‘God’s glory’ and ‘majesty’ in these cases. I suggest that we get a good idea of this by looking at a versification of the Ten Commandments made by Calvin himself which appeared in the earliest Psalters used in Reformed worship. The verse which paraphrases the second commandment runs, ‘You will not make an image, / to represent my *essence* / or to call on it or honour it ...’ (my italics)³⁰.

From this, it would seem that there is a close association for Calvin in this context between God’s glory and his essence. His concern was that by making images representing God, we might somehow damage his glory or essence. It is worth considering here, though, whether there really is a danger that the inappropriate use of images will impair God’s essence, for, as Calvin himself argues, God’s essence is imperceptible and can in no way be described. Perhaps, the danger is rather that people might believe they have captured something of God’s essence by making a representation of him, or using one in worship³¹. If they do this, they may believe they can control God and thus limit his freedom, and it was this concern about people’s attempts not just to describe, but to circumscribe God’s power, that seems to have lain at the heart of Calvin’s opposition to images³². And here we get the first hint that the problems that Calvin identified lay not so much with the images themselves as with the way people interacted with them.

A further reason Calvin gives as to why we should not make images to represent God

ainsi? C : Voire. (CR XXXIV, CO VI, pp. 55-6). English Translation: John Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, J. K. S. Reid (trans. and ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 109.

³⁰ John Calvin, *La Forme des Prières et Chantz Ecclésiastiques*, CR XXXIV, CO VI, p. 213. (My translation from the French, which runs, ‘Image point ne forgeras, / Pour mon *essence* figurer / Pour invoquer et honorer...’).

³¹ Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. 62-3.

³² Green, *op. cit.*, p. 96. For a good example of Calvin’s affirmation of God’s freedom, see his account of a story concerning the Persian leader Xerxes in *Institutes* IV, i, 5.

nor worship these or any other images is that God is spirit and should thus be worshipped spiritually. In the *Geneva Catechism*, in response to the Master's question, 'Why is it forbidden to represent God in visible shape?' the Catechumen replies,

*Because there is no resemblance between him, who is Spirit eternal and incomprehensible, and corporeal, corruptible and dead figures...*³³

In his commentary on Exodus 20: 4-6, Calvin writes: 'the worship of God must be spiritual, in order that it may correspond with his nature'³⁴. The extent to which this was a reason for Calvin's opposition to images is a point of some debate amongst scholars. Alexandre Ganoczy sees a spirit/material dichotomy at the heart of much of Calvin's thought, including his attitude to images³⁵. Ernst Saxer disputes this, saying that Calvin's approach to worship cannot merely be seen in these terms, but must also be understood in terms of a 'right religion/superstition' polarity³⁶. And indeed, Calvin does accuse those who use images in worship of superstitious practices³⁷. Michalski is probably right when he says, with reference to Saxer's critique of Ganoczy's work, that the spirit/material dichotomy was not decisive in Calvin's early theology, although I would add that it does still seem to have played an important part in it. As

³³ Latin: *M: Cur Deum non licet visibili figura exprimere? C: Quia nihil inter eum, qui spiritus est, aeternus, incomprehensibilis et corpoream, corruptibilem, mortuamque figuram simile est.* French: *M: Pourquoi est-ce qu'il n'est point licite de représenter Dieu visiblement? C: Pource qu'il n'y a nulle convenance entre luy qui est Esprit eternal, incomprehensible: et une matiere corporelle, morte, corruptible et visible....* English translation: John Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, J. K. S. Reid (trans. and ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 109.

³⁴ Latin: *(summa autem est), spiritualement esse Dei cultum, ut eius naturae respondeat.* (CR LII, CO XXIV, p. 376). English translation: John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony, Vol. II*, C. W. Bingham (trans. and ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 107.

³⁵ Alexandre Ganoczy, *The Young Calvin*, D. Foxgrover and W. Provo (trans.) (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), pp. 199-201.

³⁶ Ernst Saxer, *Aberglaube, Heuchelei und Frömmigkeit: Eine Untersuchung zu Calvins reformatorischer Eigenart* (Zurich: Zwingli Verlag, 1970), pp. 25-6.

³⁷ *Institutes* I, xi, 4 and 9.

Michalski goes on to say, it was the notions of God's majesty and glory, which I discussed above, that were fundamental to Calvin's theology, not only in shaping his attitude to images, but also in other aspects of his thought³⁸.

In a moment, I will begin to consider Calvin's injunctions in relation to religious images in more detail, in order to determine what space this leaves us for the use of other types of visual art in churches. However, before I do this, it is worth briefly looking at one other influence on Calvin which seems to have played a part in shaping his ideas about visual art, namely humanism.

Several scholars discuss the influence of humanism on Calvin and indeed François Wendel devotes an entire book to the subject³⁹. Philip Butin looks at the specific question of how Calvin's humanism influenced his attitude to late-medieval piety and how it shaped his ideas about the manner in which God should be worshipped. He argues that the emphasis on text-centred scholarship in humanism had a great influence in shaping Calvin's thoughts about worship and led him to give particular significance to the Word and the authority of Christianity's original texts, and to call for sobriety and simplicity in worship⁴⁰. Another consequence of the humanist influence on Calvin was that he believed that visual art in no way mediated God's truth. As Daniel Hardy notes, '[Calvin believed] that the arts are not interesting to those concerned for the truth as God known in God's Word'⁴¹. We will examine notions of truth and the extent to which visual art, contrary to what Calvin claimed,

³⁸ Michalski, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-3.

³⁹ F. Wendel, *Calvin et l'humanisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1976).

⁴⁰ Philip Butin, 'John Calvin's Humanist Image of Popular-Late-Medieval Piety and its Contribution to Reformed Worship' in: *Calvin Theological Journal* 29 (1994), pp. 419-31, at p. 430.

⁴¹ D. W. Hardy, 'Calvinism and the Visual Arts: A Theological Introduction', in: P. Corby Finney (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 1-16, at p. 12. I also suggest that it was Calvin's belief that the truth could not be mediated through images that led him to reject the wall paintings often referred to as the 'books of the unlearned'. See *Institutes* I, xi, 5-7.

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may in fact be able to mediate truth about God, or more precisely, God's actions in the world and our experience of these actions, in the next chapter. But, here we may conclude that Calvin's attitude to visual art was clearly shaped by his humanist education.

The limits of Calvin's injunctions

Now though, having looked at why Calvin opposed the making of images to represent God and the worship of these and other images, I want to take a closer look at both of these injunctions to try and establish more precisely what visual art would have been acceptable for him and what would not have been.

Let us begin with his first injunction, that we should not make images to represent God. We may think that what Calvin has in mind here are pictures of an old man with a grey beard in the sky, often associated with God the Father, and indeed it is true that this type of image was seen as particularly offensive by Calvinists⁴². Or we may want to broaden this category to include pictures of Christ. Certainly, as Léon Wencelius suggests, Calvin objected to representations of Jesus, for '[they]...only show half of [Christ], as he is at once man and God'⁴³. In particular, it seems that he was particularly opposed to depictions of Christ on the cross and thus we may assume he also rejected depictions of the Trinity in the form that came to be known as the *Gnadenstuhl* ('Seat of Mercy')⁴⁴. In like manner, we see that certain Calvinist painters

⁴² James R. Tani, 'Netherlandish Reformed traditions in the graphic arts, 1550-1630' in: P. Corby Finney (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 369-97, at p. 375.

⁴³ Léon Wencelius, *L'esthétique de Calvin* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1979), p. 183. (My translation). Wencelius provides a detailed list of references to support this assertion in notes 50 and 51 on p. 183. However, it should be remembered that where he refers to 'CR', the correct reference is 'CO'. So, for example, he refers the reader to 'C.R. XXVI, 157'. More properly, this is 'CR LIV, CO XXVI, p. 157'.

⁴⁴ For a discussion on the origin and meaning of this term, see: David Brown, 'The Trinity in Art', in: Stephen Davis et al. (eds.), *The Trinity: An Interdisciplinary Symposium on the Trinity* (Oxford: OUP,

did not depict Christ in their work, such as Jan Victors (c. 1619-76), a pupil of Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-69)⁴⁵. However, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter Six, such opposition to depictions of Christ in visual art by Calvin and Calvinists is based on arguments which are not altogether sound. But, the fact remains that Calvin did oppose such depictions as well as those of God the Father, although, as we shall now see, these are by no means the limit of the type of image that he rejected.

In his commentary on Exodus 20: 4, he argues that the second part of the verse, which prohibits the making of 'any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth', spoke into particular beliefs current in Old Testament times. He writes: 'some thought that God was represented under the form of fishes, others under that of birds, others in that of [beasts]; and history especially recounts by what shameless delusions Egypt was led astray'⁴⁶. So, here we begin to see that Calvin does not just limit the phrase 'representations of God' to standard representations of the persons of the Trinity, but has a far wider set of representations in mind.

1999), pp. 329-56, at pp. 342-3. Calvin arrived in Geneva after most of the iconoclastic acts had taken place there, so we would gain little idea of exactly which images he opposed merely by considering which images were removed from the churches there. (See: E. William Monter, *Calvin's Geneva* (London: John Wiley and Sons, 1967), pp. 13 and 53-56). However, we can perhaps get a reasonable, though not perfect, idea as to what sort of image Calvin opposed by considering what representations were removed by later Calvinists. Here, for example, as I note in Chapter Five, Calvinists removed an image of the *Gnadenstuhl* from the stained-glass window in the west wall of St.-Bavokerk, Haarlem in 1578. See: P. J. H. Cuypers and C. J. Gonnet, *De St. Bavokerk te Haarlem* (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1894), p. 19.

⁴⁵ Volker Manuth, 'Denomination and iconography: the choice of subject matter in the biblical painting of the Rembrandt circle', *Simiolus* 22 (1993/4), pp. 235-52, at p. 237. See also my article: 'How does the work of Rembrandt van Rijn represent a Calvinist aesthetic?' in: *Theology* (Jan./Feb. 2004), pp. 22-29, at p. 24.

⁴⁶ John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, Vol. II, C. W. Bingham (trans. and ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 107.

He makes similar comments in *Institutes*, where he castigates pagan practices such as those of the Persians who fashioned the stars into gods and the Greeks who worshipped God in human form⁴⁷. That said, he does not refrain from attacking idolatrous practices in ancient Israel, such as the fashioning of the golden calf (Exodus 32: 4)⁴⁸. When Calvin turns his attention to the practices of the contemporary church, he gives less detail about the appearance of the images that he opposes there than he does when he discusses the practices of pagan cultures and the Israel of the Old Testament⁴⁹. But, we gain a better idea of exactly what type of image he opposed in the church of his time by looking in detail at his *An Inventory of Relics*. Although, as the title suggests, Calvin's focus in this work is the profusion of relics in the late-medieval church, he does make some comments on images which help us to clarify where his major concerns lay. When he comes to discuss images of Christ in this work, it is interesting to note that he does not direct his wrath at what he describes as the usual images made by painters and sculptors, but rather at those to which people ascribed the power of relics and which they thus held in particular veneration⁵⁰. He gives us some examples, saying,

there is a species of images [of Jesus Christ] which are regarded as relics, in consequence of certain services which they have performed. To this class of images belong crucifixes, on which the beard grows; for instance, one at Burgos in Spain, another in the church of St. Salvator, and another in that of [Orange] ... The whole matter is so absurd in itself, that it cannot

⁴⁷ *Institutes* I, xi, 1.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, I, xi, 9.

⁴⁹ See n. 44 above.

⁵⁰ John Calvin, 'An Inventory of Relics', in: *Tracts and Treatises on the Reformation of the Church by John Calvin, Vol. I*, H. Beveridge (trans.), Thomas F. Torrance (ed.) (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), pp. 287-341, at p. 314. Note that this work is more often referred to as *A Treatise on Relics*.

*be at all necessary to spend time in refuting it, and yet the wretched populace are so dull, that the great majority of them think it just as certain as the gospel*⁵¹.

He then turns his attention to the Virgin Mary, and, perhaps surprisingly, here again makes a similar distinction, saying,

*it remains to speak of [the images of the Virgin Mary] – not images in general, but those which are specially celebrated for some singular quality*⁵².

Although images of the Virgin Mary in general do seem to trouble him, it is those images to which people ascribe certain powers that cause Calvin the greatest concern. And here again, as I note in the introduction to this chapter, we see that it was not just the subject matter that determined for Calvin which images were licit and which not, although this was clearly of considerable importance to him in certain cases, but rather how humans interacted with those images.

And here we see the need for Calvin's second injunction, that we should not give honour to representations of God, or other images. If we go back to our earlier example of birds and fishes, in certain cases there may be no problem with making pictures or sculptures of these creatures, and indeed doing so would conform to another of Calvin's parameters for art, that we should only paint or sculpt what can be seen by our eyes⁵³. However, if we begin to ascribe divine powers to these, and thus,

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 315-6.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 319. The reader should note that I do recognize that Calvin makes these distinctions because his main topic is relics and he is keen to specify exactly which artefacts he is discussing in this book and which he is leaving aside. However, it does show that for Calvin, as I discuss in the introduction to this chapter, there was a distinction between different images and, more importantly, he does seem to recognize that people only ascribe divine powers to certain images and not all.

⁵³ *Institutes* I, xi, 12. Indeed, stylised forms of the dove, representing the Holy Spirit, and a fish,

as Calvin would see it, collapse the distinction between the image and God, the image must then be removed⁵⁴.

It may be useful to illustrate this point by recounting an example from the writings of another Reformer, Huldreich Zwingli. Although some commentators dismiss the influence of Zwingli on Calvin, it does seem that on the question of image worship the practical consequences of their respective ideas on this matter have much in common⁵⁵. The example that Zwingli discusses is that of two representations of the Emperor Charlemagne at the Grossmünster, Zurich, one which he allows for, the other which he censures⁵⁶.

The first is a statue on the outside of one of the church towers of the Grossmünster. This represents Charlemagne seated on his throne and bespeaks his secular role, as legendary founder of a city⁵⁷. The other image is of a kneeling Charlemagne painted on an altar panel, together with a replica of the Minster. For Zwingli, this represented Charlemagne in a religious role, as legendary founder of a church, and, because of its location, was open to a religious interpretation. Thus, Zwingli said it should be removed from the church. What is perhaps most interesting, though, is that he concludes by saying that if people began to worship the statue of Charlemagne outside the church, this too would have to be removed. So, again we see that the distinction between religious images and certain other works of visual art is based not merely on

standing for the acrostic IXΘΥΣ are very common amongst many Christian denominations.

⁵⁴ See n. 26 above.

⁵⁵ For the view that the practical implications of Calvin's and Zwingli's views on images are similar, see: M. Stirm, *op. cit.*, p. 177. For the view that Calvin was not primarily influenced by Zwingli, see: Michalski, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁵⁶ Huldreich Zwingli, 'Eine Antwort, Valentin Compar gegeben' in: *Huldreich Zwinglis Sämtliche Werke, Vol. IV*, E. Egli and G. Finsler et al. (eds.) (Munich: Kraus, 1981), pp. 35-159, at pp. 95-6.

⁵⁷ Charles Garside Jr., *Zwingli and the Arts* (London: Yale University Press, 1966), pp. 150-1.

subject matter, but also on human action in relation to the images⁵⁸.

And here perhaps is the most important point to remember in trying to determine what Calvin intended when he forbade representations of God or the worship of images in his stead. For, as he himself made clear, idolatry begins with the fallenness of human nature rather than with the images themselves⁵⁹.

Human desire

For Calvin, man's ultimate objective is to know the supreme reality of God. He calls this longing or desire to know God the *sensus divinitatis* ('awareness of divinity') or the *semen religionis* ('seed of religion')⁶⁰. Before the Fall, this would have led man to seek God. But, because of the Fall, man can no longer know God properly and is denied right relationship with him. Nevertheless, the *semen religionis* still remains within him, but it has become perverted⁶¹. The right relationship with God can only be restored through his grace and revelation⁶². However, although for Calvin people in their post-lapsarian state can still know God correctly in and through the Bible, they prefer to create fantasies in their minds about the divine⁶³. For Calvin, these 'fantasies' of the mind are the precursor to the production of visible, material idols⁶⁴.

⁵⁸ Ronald Wallace speculates that it may be that Calvin had no objection to the Romanesque carvings of historical scenes and the statues which ornamented the medieval churches as long as they were not used for worship. Again, this position seems to ally the practical implications of his position to those of Zwingli's. See: R. Wallace, *Calvin, Geneva and the Reformation* (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1988), p. 108.

⁵⁹ Eire, *op. cit.*, pp. 203 and 206.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 204, and *Institutes* I, iii, 1, and I, iv, 1.

⁶¹ *Institutes* I, iv, 1.

⁶² Eire, *op. cit.*, p. 203, and *Institutes* II, ii, 12 and 17.

⁶³ Eire, *op. cit.*, p. 205. William J. Bouwsma also notes Calvin's distaste for these 'fantasies' of the mind, although he sees this as Calvin's pejorative label for the imagination and creativity. This goes too far, for, as I will argue in Chapter Two, Calvin does allow for human creativity, when inspired by the Holy Spirit. See: William J. Bouwsma, *John Calvin, A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), p. 80.

⁶⁴ Here again, it is worth noting a similarity between the ideas of Calvin and those of Zwingli in relation to images. Zwingli argued that what he saw as idols (*götzen*) were material emanations of 'fantasies' or

As he remarks in his Sermon on Deuteronomy 5, vv. 15-20, 'men have their physical senses and that is why they conceive of God imagining him according to their own nature, and thus make images of him'⁶⁵. Again, in *Institutes* I, xi, 8, he writes, '...man tries to express in his work the sort of God he has inwardly conceived. There the mind begets an idol; the hand gives it birth'⁶⁶. For Calvin, the final and most damaging consequence of this is that man worships the idols that he creates with his hands. He writes, 'for when men thought they gazed upon God in images, they also worshipped him in them'⁶⁷.

But, as I said above, it is the distortion of the *semen religionis*, man's innate desire to know God, that is the starting point of idolatry. However, I would suggest that for Calvin the perversion of the *semen religionis* would not only have the worship of images as its result. Indeed, although idolatry, understood here as the worship of images, is a proof for Calvin of the existence and activity of the *semen religionis*, it is only one of the many possible consequences of this phenomenon⁶⁸. Calvin's central concern is that man seeks to re-establish right relationship with God, but does so

idols (*abgötten*) of the mind. See: Charles Garside Jr., *op. cit.*, pp. 147-9, Hans-Dietrich Altendorf, 'Zwinglis Stellung zum Bild und die Tradition christlicher Bildfeindschaft', in: *Unsere Kunstdenkmäler* 35 (1984), Vol. 3, pp. 267-275, at p. 270, and Eire, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-5.

⁶⁵ French: [*Les hommes*] *ont leur sens charnels, et voyla pourquoy ils conçooyvent Dieu, et l'imaginent selon leur naturel : et là dessus ils luy font des images.* (CR LIV, CO XXVI, p. 148). In a similar vein, a little later Calvin makes the same point again saying, 'as soon as we begin to tie ourselves in knots in our imaginations, then we are in an endless abyss of mad thoughts...it perverts everything when we want to make some image of God'. (My translation). (French :...*si tost que nous commençons de nous entortiller en nos imaginations, voila incontinent un abysme de folles pensees...c'est tout pervertir, quand nous voudrions faire quelque image à Dieu.*) (CR LIV, CO XXVI, p. 152).

⁶⁶ Latin: *quod homo, qualem intus concepit Deum, exprimere opera tentat: Mens igitur idolum gignit, manus parit.* (CR XXX, CO II, p. 80). French: [*l'entendement humain*] *ose attenter d'exprimer au dehors les folles qu'il a conçu en soy touchant de Dieu. Par quoy l'esprit humain engendre les idoles, et la main les enfante.* (CR XXXI, CO III, p. 130).

⁶⁷ *Institutes* I, xi, 9. Latin: *quum enim Deum se homines in simulacris intueri arbitrarentur, et ipsum quoque illic coluerunt.* (CR XXX, CO II, p. 81). French: *et de fait, quand les hommes ont pensé qu'ils voyoyent Dieu ou sa remembrance, aux images, ils l'ont là aussi honoré* (CR XXXI, CO III, p. 131).

⁶⁸ *Institutes* I, iii, 1, and I, iv, 1.

through erroneous means⁶⁹. But, as well as using images, we might reasonably ask whether there are other objects that people use in their attempt to restore the prelapsarian relationship with God. For example, we might hold particular preachers or priests in high esteem, even to the extent of worshipping them, in our minds at least⁷⁰. We may greatly esteem other members of the congregation to whom we are attracted either by physical appearance or the strength of their personality and allow this esteem to take our attention away from God.

I suggest, though, that this is not merely a phenomenon bounded by the walls of church buildings, and just as there was much use of images outside church in the late-medieval period, so I would argue there are other objects outside churches that we might to-day to try to reconnect with God⁷¹. For example, some people may privilege their material possessions such as cars and houses and may even revere people such as sportsmen and women or film or pop stars to the extent that they give them the honour due to God. Of course, I am not suggesting that we do away with these objects, or even these people, but I am merely trying to show that it is wrong to see images such as paintings and sculptures as the only objects to which we might give the honour due

⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that Calvin first discusses the concept of the *semen religionis* in *Institutes* I, iii and I, iv, which precede his discussion of images and deal with the knowledge of God in general terms.

⁷⁰ I suggest that it might be an interesting area for further study to see whether there is any correlation between type of church and the extent to which special honour or reverence is given to certain church leaders.

⁷¹ We can see examples of some of the images and other aids to piety used by private individuals in the late-medieval period in: Gabriele Finaldi, *The Image of Christ*, Neil MacGregor (intro.) (London: National Gallery, 2000). Carlos Eire argues that Calvin 'earths' his discussion on desire by looking at what happens in the act of worship. (See Eire, *op. cit.*, pp. 212-220). He says that 'by examining what happens in the act of worship itself, Calvin is able to juxtapose human desires and capabilities with the objective reality of God' (pp. 212-3). Eire says that in practical terms this is like asking the question, 'What happens when a person kneels in church?' (p. 213). But, we often worship God outside churches, e.g. in house groups. Further, desire to worship is not merely something that is precipitated when we come into a church. It is, rather, something that we constantly have to deal with as human beings. I would therefore argue that we are prone to worshipping things as God outside church just as much as inside it. So, to consider, as Calvin seems to, that the *semen religionis* is only something that operates in churches is, I believe, incorrect.

to God.

As I mention above, Calvin saw grace and revelation as the means to re-educate the *semen religionis* and to properly bridge the gap between ourselves and God⁷². What we also need to do is to manage our desires, and, as Calvin would argue, we cannot do this without grace and revelation⁷³. If we do direct our desire for God appropriately, then we can retain these objects without idolizing them. And further, we can also have works of visual art both inside and outside churches, as long as they conform to the parameters that Calvin set for them, namely that they should not represent God and that they should only represent what we can see⁷⁴.

Histories and landscapes: two categories of art suitable for Reformed churches

So, within these parameters, let us now consider more specifically what type of art we might legitimately use within Reformed churches. The first category in this regard is that of histories. Before 1543, Calvin had written little in favour of any type of art. That said, in the second edition of *Institutes*, published in 1539, he does affirm the work of Bezalel and Oholiab in constructing the Tabernacle in the Book of Exodus, arguing that this is an example of the Holy Spirit distributing its benefits to whomever it will⁷⁵. However, in the 1543 Latin edition of *Institutes*, Calvin introduces two new paragraphs on works of visual art, which remained unchanged in all subsequent Latin editions of *Institutes* up to and including the final edition, published in 1559⁷⁶. In the first of these, which in the final edition was paragraph I, xi, 12, Calvin says that it is

⁷² Eire, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

⁷³ *Institutes* II, ii, 12 and 17.

⁷⁴ *Institutes* I, xi, 12.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, II, ii, 16. For a good introduction to the gradual shift in Calvin's attitude to images, and works of visual art in general, see: Daniel Augsburger, 'Calvin et le Second Commandement', in: O. Fatio and P. Fraenkel (eds.), *Histoire de l'exégèse au XVI^e siècle* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1978), pp. 84-94.

⁷⁶ In the 1559 edition of *Institutes*, these are paragraphs I, xi, 12 and 13.

acceptable to depict histories (*historiae ac res gestae*) as ‘they have some use in teaching or admonition’⁷⁷.

However, having affirmed histories, Calvin does not then go onto define what he means by the term. Perhaps he believed his readers would know exactly what he meant by its use, but as I now discuss, we need to delve a little deeper to understand both what he may have meant then and how this term might be interpreted now.

We could begin this process by considering the work of Martin Bucer, for it is clear that some of what Calvin wrote about images was influenced by the Strasbourg Reformer. And indeed Bucer himself affirms histories (*Geschichten*), and goes further than Calvin in his praise for them, saying both that they are a reminder of God’s will towards us and, perhaps more interestingly, that they can therefore improve the spiritual life of his people⁷⁸.

However, to answer our question more fully, it is perhaps better to go back to the example that Zwingli gives of the two representations of the Emperor Charlemagne at the Grossmünster, Zurich, which I discuss above⁷⁹. This example can also help us to understand what Zwingli meant when he affirmed images that are *in geschichteswyss* (‘as the representation of historical events’) in another of his works written two years previously⁸⁰.

⁷⁷ Latin: *usum in docendo vel admonendo aliquem habent*. (CR XXX, CO II, p. 83).

⁷⁸ For example, Bernard Cottret argues that Calvin’s 1545 *Geneva Catechism* was influenced by Bucer’s 1534 Catechism, entitled *Kurze Schriftliche Erklärung*. (See: Bernard Cottret, *Calvin: A Biography*, M. Wallace McDonald (trans.) (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), p. 171, n. 43). And indeed, Bucer says in his Catechism that making works of art is a gift from God, a point that Calvin himself stresses in *Institutes* I, xi, 12. Bucer also says we should make pictures that admonish, a call echoed by Calvin when he advocated histories in the same paragraph in *Institutes* from 1543 onwards. See: Martin Bucer, ‘Katechismus von 1534’ in: *Martin Bucers Deutsche Schriften* 6,3, R. Stuperrich (ed.) (Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1987), p. 107.

⁷⁹ See p. 16 above.

⁸⁰ Garside, *op. cit.*, pp. 150-1. Zwingli uses the term *in geschichteswyss* in his work ‘Eine Kurze Christliche Einleitung’. (See: Huldreich Zwingli, ‘Eine Kurze Christliche Einleitung’, in: *Huldreich*

The first thing we learn is that, as I mentioned above, it is not solely the subject matter of a representation that determines whether or not a work of art is suitable for a church. For Zwingli, the most important difference between these two images was how Charlemagne was portrayed. In one, he was portrayed in a religious role and in the other in a secular role. For Zwingli, the latter was acceptable, as long as it was not given the honour due to God. This, of course, reminds us that human interaction with a work of art can determine whether or not it is suitable. However, what may surprise us is that the work of art that Zwingli did not object to was a statue, a three-dimensional work of art. As one commentator notes, in the late-medieval period, three-dimensionality along with colour was commonly seen as one of the markers of idolatry⁸¹. However, this did not seem to unduly concern Zwingli in relation to the statue of Charlemagne, and this perhaps allows us to consider the use of statues in churches as well as pictures. Finally, however, what was important to him was the position of works of art. Although he did want to exclude all representational works of art from churches, I would argue that his primary concern was to avoid placing them in positions where people might be more inclined to worship them⁸².

Some may argue that it is inappropriate to use an example from Zwingli's writings to clarify Calvin's position on images, as they would say that Zwingli had little influence on him and indeed suggest that it was Bucer who had a much stronger influence on

Zwingli's Sämtliche Werke, Vol. II, E. Egli and G. Finsler (eds.) (Munich: Kraus, 1981), pp. 626-63, at p. 658). In this edition, a gloss of Zwingli's phrase is given as *als Darstellung historischer Ereignisse*. I translate this gloss with the words 'as the representation of historical events'.

⁸¹ Michael Camille, 'Deguileville's Idolatry' in: J. Dimmick et al. (eds.), *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England: Textuality and the Visual Image* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), pp. 151-171, at p. 169.

⁸² For Zwingli's desire to exclude all images from churches, see: Huldreich Zwingli (Vol. II), *op. cit.*, p. 658, ll. 14-23. Note that in *Eine kurze christliche Einleitung*, Zwingli argues that the precedent of using decoration in the temple of Solomon, including cherubim, meant that contemporary churches could also contain (appropriate) decoration. (Zwingli (Vol. II), *op. cit.*, p. 658, (ll. 1-5).

him⁸³. Although others dispute this, for example Margarete Stirm, it might be useful to look at a more recent example firmly rooted within the Reformed tradition⁸⁴.

In St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh, an important place of worship in the Church of Scotland, which stands very much in the Reformed tradition, there is a life-size statue of John Knox, about whose affinity with Calvin there is little doubt. The statue does not stand in the crossing, which is the focus of worship in this church in modern times, but towards the west end. Here, it can be seen as people enter the building, but in this position, it is not, and is unlikely to become, the focus of worship. Should this change, then it would have to be removed. However, the statue serves a useful purpose in reminding those who enter the church of the origins of the Reformed tradition in Scotland and is doubtless seen as a source of inspiration by those who come to worship in the church. For, as one commentator notes, the statue conveys something of the energy that those who heard Knox preach must have felt⁸⁵.

So, we see that the category of history includes not only depictions of past events, but also representations of historical figures. I give more examples of what types of works may be included in this category in Chapters Five and Six, but in concluding this section I remind the reader that in deciding whether a work of art belongs to this category or could more properly be seen as a religious image, we must not only

⁸³ Michalski, *op. cit.*, pp. 61-2.

⁸⁴ Stirm, *op. cit.* Stirm suggests three ways in which Zwingli's ideas about images may have reached and influenced Calvin. Firstly, she suggests that Calvin may have read what Zwingli wrote about images himself (p. 167). Secondly, Calvin may have encountered Zwingli's works during his time in Strasbourg, particularly through his acquaintance with Bucer (pp. 167-8). Thirdly, Calvin may have been influenced by Zwingli's ideas through his encounter with the work of another Zurich Reformer, Leo Jud. ~~Stirm suggests that Jud's theology itself was influenced by that of Zwingli, and it is also~~ interesting to note that Calvin follows Jud in his division of the first and second commandments. That said, Jud and thus Calvin both differ in this regard from the practice of Zwingli, as well as that of Bucer in his 1534 Catechism and Martin Luther, (pp. 166-7 and 238).

⁸⁵ John McIlwain (ed.), *St. Giles' Cathedral* (Norwich: Pitkin, 1994), pp. 10-11. I also visited the church personally on Thursday, 20th January 2005.

consider its subject matter, but also aspects such as how people interact with it and its positioning.

Let us now turn to the second category that I want to argue for here, namely landscapes. And here, our task is somewhat more difficult, for, at first sight at least, Calvin seems to ascribe little value to such works.

We begin by returning to the 1543 Latin edition of *Institutes*, in which Calvin first mentions history paintings. In the same passage, he says that another type of representation that conforms to the precept of depicting only what is visible and which can thus be sculpted or painted is ‘images and forms of bodies (*imagines ac formae corporum*) [where there is no depiction] of past events’. However, whereas he suggests that histories may be useful in teaching or admonishing, Calvin says of this second type that he does not ‘see what they can afford other than pleasure’⁸⁶. But, as with the corresponding description of histories, this does not give us much idea as to what type of picture he was referring to⁸⁷.

However, in the French edition of *Institutes*, published two years later in 1545, which is to a great extent a translation of the 1543 Latin edition, Calvin does expand on the phrase ‘images and forms of bodies’. In fact, we have two versions of this phrase. In one, Calvin says that it is *figures, ou médales de bestes, ou villes, ou pais* (‘figures, or medals depicting animals or towns or country scenes’) that provide only pleasure. In the second, this list is replaced by *les arbres, montaignes, rivières, et personages* (‘trees, mountains, rivers and people’)⁸⁸. Despite this difference, in both cases Calvin

⁸⁶ *Institutes* I, xi, 12. Latin: *quid praeter oblectationem afferre possint, non video*. (CR XXX, CO II, p. 83).

⁸⁷ See pp. 20-21 above.

⁸⁸ CR XXXI, CO III, p. 136. This only cites the first version. For both this and the variant reading, see: Jean Calvin, *Institution de la Religion Chrestienne, Livre Premier, op. cit.*, p. 135.

says that pictures which include figures and natural features only provide pleasure and have no value in teaching. We might think it strange that he does not distinguish between these two subjects and it is tempting to ascribe it to what one commentator refers to as Calvin's lack of visual hermeneutic⁸⁹. However, I suggest that if we look at works of art painted during Calvin's lifetime, it is not difficult to see why he groups these subjects together. For example, if we consider *Rest on the Flight into Egypt* (Madrid: Museo Nacional del Prado), painted by the Flemish artist, Joachim Patinir, in about 1520, we see Mary with the child Jesus in what one might call an imaginary or idealized landscape⁹⁰. It is clear in this picture, which naturally lends itself to private devotion, that the subject of the painting is Mary with child, and that the landscape provides a mere backdrop for the figures in the foreground. Such a painting conforms to the Renaissance belief that landscape was not a subject worthy of depiction by itself, but should merely play a supporting role for the main human or divine subject. As Malcolm Andrews puts it, 'it [was] the *parergon* to the Argument'⁹¹. However, as a recent exhibition entitled *The Invention of Landscape* demonstrates, from this period onwards landscape increasingly became a subject in its own right⁹².

If we look at works from later in the same century, we begin to see that both the human figures and landscape features demand the status of main subject and that

⁸⁹ Cottin, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

⁹⁰ See the exhibition catalogue: P. Huvenne et al. (eds.), *De uitvinding van het landschap. Van Patinir tot Rubens 1520-1650* (Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten Antwerpen, 2004), p. 54.

⁹¹ Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p. 28.

⁹² See: P. Huvenne et al. (eds.), *op. cit.*— I do not suggest that the process by which landscape became a subject in its own right was a smooth, continuous one, and indeed it is interesting to note that in his later work, Patinir himself increasingly made religious figures the subjects of his paintings, with landscape acting as a mere backdrop. (See: Huvenne, p. 88). However, if one looks at paintings at the beginning of the sixteenth century and those of the mid-seventeenth century, one can clearly see that landscape moves from being a mere decoration to being the subject of paintings in its own right.

landscape has moved from being mere background decoration to becoming at least as important as the figures that populate it. For example, we see this in Pieter Bruegel the Elder's *The Harvesters* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art) painted in 1565⁹³, and Jan Massijs' *The Calling of Elisha* (Antwerp: Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten) painted in 1572⁹⁴. In both works, we also see a more naturalistic depiction of landscape than in Patinir's 1520 work.

By the seventeenth century, landscape had become firmly established as a subject in its own right and there is no better example of this than the work of the Dutch artist, Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/9-1682). In *The Mill near Wijk* (Amsterdam: Rijksmuseum) painted in about 1670, the subjects are clearly the natural features depicted and the windmill. The painting is populated by several tiny figures, whose presence may only serve to give a sense of the scale of the other features⁹⁵.

Going back to Calvin's critique of non-history paintings, I suggest that works of art such as these provide the viewer with far more than pleasure. Although landscape art is by nature complex and open to a variety of interpretations, if one is so minded, one could interpret paintings such as this from a religious perspective⁹⁶. The windmill could bespeak God's providential care for his people, or, as David Brown suggests, 'the prosperity that comes through divine order'⁹⁷. Likewise, towering clouds, such as those in van Ruisdael's *Het Korenveld* ('The Wheatfield'), which I discuss in detail in

⁹³ For a copy of this, see: F. Grossmann, *Pieter Bruegel: Complete Edition of the Paintings* (London: Phaidon, 1973), plate 101.

⁹⁴ P. Huvenne et al. (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 114-5.

⁹⁵ W. Stechow, *Dutch Landscape Painting of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Phaidon, 1966), plate 115. The relative size of the figures may also remind us of man's relative insignificance in relation to other features in creation, or, bearing in mind what I say in the following paragraph, may make us remember how small we are in comparison to God.

⁹⁶ See the response by Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann to a series of essays on Dutch art in: P. Corby Finney (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 422.

⁹⁷ David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), p. 111, n. 109.

Chapter Seven, might speak of God's presence in and over the created order⁹⁸.

For Calvin, as we learn in the *Geneva Catechism*, the created order is a 'mirror' in which we can gain a sense, albeit an imperfect one, of the divine⁹⁹. This idea was still very much alive in seventeenth century Dutch Calvinism, as reflected in the *Heidelberg Catechism*, and sermons preached thereon, and we still find evidence of it to-day¹⁰⁰.

I suggest that although Calvin said he did not see any educative value in depictions of landscape features in art, this was because during his time the natural world had not yet become a subject of painting in its own right. When it did so, it also gained epistemological value and the power to inform us about God's action in his creation.

So, to conclude this section, I suggest that what we have with depictions of histories, particularly those which represent Biblical events, without trying to depict divinity, and landscapes are representations of the first and second books of God's revelation.

Through a process of 'selective naturalness', whereby rather than merely copying what he or she sees, the artist makes a choice about what to depict, we are provided with insights into these subjects which are not merely pleasurable, but also have an educative value¹⁰¹. Indeed, in the next chapter I will look in more detail at the epistemological value of such paintings and suggest that they provide a means for us

⁹⁸ This currently hangs in the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam and is inventory number 1742.

⁹⁹ John Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, J. K. S. Reid (trans. and ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 93-4. See also: Cornelis van der Kooi, *As in a Mirror: John Calvin and Karl Barth on Knowing God: a Diptych*, Donald Mader (trans.) (Leiden: Brill, 2005), pp. 57 ff.

¹⁰⁰ For example, question 27 of the 10th Sunday of the Catechism asks, *Wat verstaat gij onder de voorzienigheid van God?* ('What do you understand by the providence of God?' (my translation)). See: Klaas Zwanepol (intro.), *Belijdenisgeschriften voor de Protestantse Kerk in Nederland* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2004), pp. 73-103. For evidence that the idea is still current today, consider the creation windows in St.-Bavokerk, Haarlem, and the Jeruzalemkerk, Amsterdam that I discuss in detail in Chapter Five.

¹⁰¹ E. John Walford, *Jacob van Ruisdael and the Perception of Landscape* (London: Yale University Press, 1991), pp. 20 and 28.

to fulfil what Calvin states at the very beginning of *Institutes* should be our two most important epistemological aims: to gain knowledge of God's action in the world¹⁰² and knowledge of ourselves¹⁰³.

But before I do this, we need to look at one particular paragraph in *Institutes* (I, xi, 13) in which Calvin specifically argues that all *imagines*¹⁰⁴ should be removed from churches. In order to affirm the use of appropriate works of art in churches in the Reformed tradition, it will be necessary to refute the arguments that Calvin uses in this paragraph and it is to this task that I now turn for the final section of this chapter.

Calvin's arguments against the use of all works of visual art in churches

Like the paragraph before it in Calvin's *Institutes*, paragraph I, xi, 13 first appeared in the 1543 edition of the work and then in all subsequent editions. In a discussion on the development of Calvin's attitude to psalmody in church worship, Charles Garside notes that in the 1543 edition of *Institutes*, Calvin first used a triadic pattern of history, the Church Fathers and Scripture with which to support his arguments¹⁰⁵. He uses a

¹⁰² *Institutes* I, i, 1 in fact begins with the words, 'Nearly all the wisdom we possess...consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves'. However, it is clear from what he goes on to write that for Calvin because of the Fall man is prevented from knowing God in the sense that he might know his essence, as this would violate God's transcendence. So, here and elsewhere I say that for Calvin it is God's actions in the world that we can know, rather than God himself. Compare the section on human desire above.

¹⁰³ *Institutes* I, i, 1.

¹⁰⁴ I use the word *imagines* (plural of *imago*) here as this is the word Calvin himself uses at the start of *Institutes* I, xi, 13 to describe what he wants to remove from churches. It is clear that what Calvin has in mind here is more than just religious images, for he includes histories amongst these works, and it is unlikely that all of these would have been seen as images which had a relationship to the divine. However, the matter is made more complicated by the fact that it is likely that the works he discusses in the first two sections of this paragraph, relating to the early church and the writings of Augustine of Hippo, were for the most part religious images. This perhaps reminds us again of Calvin's lack of visual hermeneutic, or possibly a lack of precision in his choice of words. But it also presents us with the challenge of what terminology we should use in this discussion. As I see it, Calvin was keen to remove all works of visual art from churches, and this is what he states in the first sentence of *Institutes* I, xi, 13, but he used examples relating to religious images to support his position. This being so, I will describe here what he is arguing against as works of art, but those objects that he discusses in support of his arguments as religious images. See also p. 2 above, where I discuss Calvin's broad use of the term *imago*.

¹⁰⁵ Charles Garside Jr., 'The Origins of Calvin's Theory of Music 1536-43', in: *Transactions of the*

similar approach in his argument against works of art, calling in turn on the early church, Augustine of Hippo and the First Epistle of St. John. I will now look at each of these arguments in the order that Calvin presents them and suggest that whilst one of them, the second one, could be used to support the removal of religious images from churches, none of them provides sufficient grounds for the exclusion of all works of art from churches, which, it seems, is Calvin's purpose here¹⁰⁶.

So, let us begin with Calvin's first argument, that since early churches were usually devoid of images, contemporary churches should similarly be clear of these and other works of art. He writes,

*...let us...examine if it is expedient to have in Christian churches any images at all, whether they represent past events or the bodies of men. First, if the authority of the ancient church moves us in anyway, we will recall that for about five hundred years, during which religion was still flourishing, and a purer doctrine thriving, Christian churches were commonly empty of images*¹⁰⁷.

There are a couple of reasons why this is not a sound argument with which to advocate the removal of all works of art from churches. First, in the early centuries of Christianity, it is likely that there were few dedicated places of worship, in particular because it was not licit within the Roman Empire until 313 A. D. As Paul Corby Finney notes, for the first two centuries of Christianity there is an 'absence of

American Philosophical Society 69 (1979), pp. 1-36, at p. 20.

¹⁰⁶ This is the thrust of the first sentence of *Institutes* I, xi, 13.

¹⁰⁷ *Institutes* I, xi, 13. Latin: *...an ullas omnino imagines, sive quae res gestae, sive quae hominum corpora figurent, habere in templis christianis expediat...expendamus. Principio, si quid nos movet veteris ecclesiae autoritas, meminerimus quingentis circiter annis, quibus magis adhuc florebat religio, et sincerior doctrina vigeat, christiana templa fuisse communiter ab imaginibus vacua.* (CR XXX, CO II, p. 84). Here, we clearly see that Calvin uses the term *imago* in a broad sense, although for him the term also has a religious dimension.

identifiable Christian places of worship'. From the third century onwards, he comments that Christians gathered for worship in residential structures. As these were primarily secular places for living in, it is unlikely they would have contained permanent images for use in worship¹⁰⁸. So although this may lead us to conclude that there were not many images in Christian places of worship in the early centuries of Christianity, the reasons for this, particularly the official opposition to its practice and, consequently, the relative lack of dedicated places of worship, lead us to conclude that it is inappropriate for Calvin to use this example as an argument for their removal from churches over one thousand years later.

Secondly, it is clear from both historical and archaeological sources that there were some buildings dedicated to worship which contrary to Calvin's assertion did contain images. For example, in 306 the local synod in Elvira, Spain, elected to prohibit wall paintings with biblical themes in churches. As Guntram Koch notes, such a prohibition would only make sense if a good number of churches had been decorated with such wall paintings¹⁰⁹. Indeed, Calvin could not even plead ignorance of this decision for he discusses it himself only a few paragraphs earlier in *Institutes*¹¹⁰. We also have archaeological evidence which stands against Calvin's argument. It is tempting to refer the reader to the large amount of images to be found in early

¹⁰⁸ Paul Corby Finney, 'Early Christian Architecture: The Beginnings (A Review Article)' in: *Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 81: 3, 1988, pp. 319-339, at p. 328. Finney also notes that those Christian buildings that did exist in the first three hundred years of Christianity were often either confiscated or, worse, destroyed, in particular during times of persecution, such as those instigated by Diocletian in the early fourth century A. D.

¹⁰⁹ Guntram Koch, *Early Christian Art and Architecture*, John-Bowden (trans:) (London: SCM Press, 1996), pp. 88-9. As Koch notes (p. 88), it is likely that there were churches with wall paintings from early in the third century, although evidence from this period of the use of images in buildings dedicated specifically to worship is scarce. See also: Margaret Miles, *Image as Insight: visual understanding in Western Christianity and secular culture* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985).

¹¹⁰ *Institutes* I, xi, 6.

Christian catacombs¹¹¹. However, although there is no disagreement on the fact that they were used as Christian burial places, scholars do seem to disagree on whether or not catacombs were used as places of Christian worship¹¹². More compelling, perhaps, are the depictions of human figures on the walls of the Christian baptistery at Dura Europos, dated to c. 245 A. D.¹¹³ Later examples of images in Christian buildings include a depiction of Jesus enthroned with his apostles in the heavenly Jerusalem, in the apse of the *Basilica of St. Pudenziana*, Rome, dated to c. 400 A. D.¹¹⁴ and the mosaics in the *Mausoleum of Galla Placidia* and the *Neonian Baptistery* in Ravenna, dating from the fifth century A. D.¹¹⁵ So, it is clear that Calvin's assertion that early Christian churches were 'commonly empty of images' is wrong, and that this cannot be used to support his or any subsequent argument for the exclusion of all works of art, let alone religious images, from churches.

Where Calvin might have been on firmer ground would have been to assert that there were certain voices in the early church which rejected the use of images in worship. One of these was Tertullian and indeed one of the sources for Calvin's exegesis of the second commandment may have been the early Church Father's *De idololatria*, in which he states that both the making and the worship of images is rejected by God¹¹⁶.

¹¹¹ See for example: Antonio Baruffa, *The Catacombs of St. Callixtus: History-Archaeology-Faith*, 2nd edition, William Purdy (trans.) (Vatican City: L.E.V., 2000), p. 80. Here, Baruffa shows us that depictions of Christian stories are to be found, dating from the first half of third century, in the Cubicula of the Sacraments in the Catacombs of St. Callixtus, just outside the walls of Ancient Rome. In Cubiculum of the Sacraments A3, there is a representation of 'The fisherman and Jesus baptised by St. John the Baptist in the River Jordan'. In Cubiculum A6, there is a representation of the 'Multiplication of the bread and fish, pre-figurations of the Eucharist'.

¹¹² See J. Stevenson, *The Catacombs, Rediscovered monuments of early Christianity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1978), p. 24.

¹¹³ Robin Margaret Jensen, *Understanding Early Christian Art* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 88.

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 108-9.

¹¹⁵ For examples of both, see: Helen de Borchgrave, *A Journey into Christian Art* (Oxford: Lion Publishing, 1999), pp. 16-19.

¹¹⁶ Irena Backus, 'L'Exode 20, 3-4 et l'interdiction des images. L'emploi de la tradition patristique par

But, I wonder whether in this work Tertullian had in mind religious images in particular rather than the whole range of representations that we now consider as works of visual art. I believe he did and suggest that likewise his fellow Church Father Augustine of Hippo merely had religious images in mind in those passages from his work that Calvin uses to support his rejection of all *imagines* from churches in the second part of *Institutes* I, xi, 13¹¹⁷. This is important for although Augustine's arguments merit our attention, they only relate to religious images and cannot thus be used, as Calvin tries to use them, to argue for the removal of all works of art from churches.

Clearly today, perhaps more so than in the past, works of art such as histories and landscapes are made, which are in no way attempts to represent God, or create a relationship to the divine. They are quite distinct from what are traditionally seen as religious images, including those images against which Augustine was specifically arguing¹¹⁸, and as I will argue throughout this thesis, it is appropriate to use works

Zwingli et par Calvin', in: *Unsere Kunstdenkmäler 35, Vol. 3, 1984*, pp. 319-22, at p. 321.

¹¹⁷ English: 'When [the images/idols] are established in these seats...in honourable loftiness, so that they are attended by those who pray and those who sacrifice, by the very likeness of living members and senses...they affect infirm minds, so that they seem to live and breathe...for the shape of the idol's bodily members makes and in a sense compels the mind dwelling in a body to suppose that the idol's body too has feeling, because it looks very like its own body...images have more power to bend the unhappy soul, because they have mouth, eyes, ears, feet, than to straighten it, because they do not speak, or see, or hear, or walk'. (*Institutes* I, xi, 13).

Latin: *Quum his sedibus locantur...honorabili sublimitate, ut a precantibus atque immolantibus attendantur, ipsa similitudine animatorum membrorum atque sensuum...afficiunt infirmos animos, ut vivere ac spirare videantur, etc...hoc enim facit et quodammodo extorquet illa figura membrorum, ut animus in corpore vivens magis arbitretur sentire corpus, quod suo simillimum videt, etc...plus valent simulacra ad curvandam infelicem animam, quod os, oculos, aures, pedes habent; quam ad corrigendam, quod non loquuntur, neque vident, neque audiunt, neque ambulant.* (CR XXX, CO II, p. 84). The last section of this passage comes from Psalm 115, which for Augustine was numbered Psalm 113. See his commentary on it in: Philip Schoff (ed.), *A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, Vol. VIII* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996), pp. 551-4.

¹¹⁸ It is worth considering here the extent to which in both Old Testament and early church times, there existed images which were not used for religious purposes. If there were not many, this may help to explain the close association between the making of images and their use in worship. This may be a fruitful avenue for further study.

such as these, i.e. histories and landscapes, in churches, as long as they are not used for the worship of God. That said, as we have seen in the case of Zwingli's example of the two representations of Charlemagne above, there is always a danger that people might use works not set up initially as religious images in order to engage with the divine. In cases such as this, the works of art should be removed¹¹⁹. However, as we see with the statue of John Knox in St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh¹²⁰, works of art can be placed in churches without their being worshipped, and as long as this continues to be so, they can remain in position.

Calvin's third argument against the use of all works of art in churches is based on a passage in the First Epistle of St. John. Calvin writes,

[The fact that we ascribe divine powers to images] seems likely to be the reason why John wished to warn us not only against the worship of idols but also against idols themselves [I John 5: 21]¹²¹.

At first glance, the passage to which Calvin refers would indeed seem to support his argument. It runs, 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols' (NRSV)¹²². However, as several commentators note, it is unlikely that John is referring to religious images here, particularly given the context in which this injunction is placed. Rudolf Bultmann argues that in accordance with the warning that persists throughout I John and corresponding to the characteristic of faith given in the preceding verse, this verse can only be an admonition to guard against false doctrine, and εἰδῶλα is to be

¹¹⁹ See p. 16 above.

¹²⁰ See p. 23 above.

¹²¹ Latin: *(Haec) sane videtur causa esse cur Ioannes (I Ioann. 5, 21) non tantum a simulacrorum cultu, sed ab ipsis quoque simulacris cavere nos voluerit.* (CR XXX, CO II, p. 84).

¹²² Greek: τεκνία φυλάξατε ἑαυτά ἀπὸ τῶν εἰδῶλων.

understood in the sense of ‘false gods’¹²³. Georg Strecker discusses the term at some length in his commentary on the passage, bringing together the exegesis of various commentators. None of these limits themselves to Calvin’s view that the word refers to religious images. Strecker himself sees the reading of ‘false gods’ as a possibility but suggests it should be seen as a specific example of ‘mortal sin’ about which warnings have been given earlier in the Epistle. Finally, though, he sees the verse as a general encouragement to believers to keep themselves apart from anything that could take the place of God. In Calvin’s defence, this may include images, but John clearly has much more in mind than these alone¹²⁴.

So, it seems that despite his best efforts, Calvin does not provide us with convincing arguments for the removal of all works of art from churches. That said, this discussion again reminds us that we must always be careful when using works of art not to repeat what some would see as the errors of the past. But, as long as we remember these lessons from history and also work within the framework that Calvin sets out in *Institutes* I, xi, 12, I suggest it is reasonable to use appropriate works of visual art in churches in the Reformed tradition.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion, I hope that the reader now has a clearer understanding of what precisely Calvin wrote about religious images and visual art in general and can see that his concern was not just about the subject of works of visual art, but also about how these works were used by people in worship. Far from being opposed to all

¹²³ R. Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles: A Commentary on the Johannine Epistles*, R. Philip o’Hara et al. (trans.), R. W. Fund (ed.) (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), p. 91.

¹²⁴ G. Strecker, *The Johannine Letters: A Commentary on 1, 2 and 3 John*, Linda M. Maloney (trans.), H. Attridge (ed.) (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), pp. 212-4. It is worth noting that I have been unable to trace a reference to this verse in the work of Augustine of Hippo. It may be worthwhile investigating whether any other Church Father, such as John Chrysostom, commented on this verse.

works of art, Calvin affirmed sculpture and painting as gifts from God¹²⁵, but did not want people to see religious images and God as one. Further, although he did try to argue against the presence of works of art in churches, we can reject his arguments for the reasons just given.

In the next chapter, I will again look at Calvin's writings, but rather than considering what he wrote about works of visual art as I have done in this chapter, I will examine other aspects of his thought, in particular his epistemology and his eschatology and try to suggest that we may find arguments in favour of the use of works of art in churches from within the resources of his writings on these subjects.

¹²⁵ *Institutes* I, xi, 12.

Chapter Two: Epistemology and Eschatology: How we can know of God's activity in the world through works of art from within the theology of John Calvin

Introduction

In Chapter One, we looked in detail at the arguments put forward by John Calvin for excluding works of visual art in general, and religious images in particular, from churches. I argued that, far from being opposed to all works of art, Calvin was primarily concerned with eradicating two related practices. First, he opposed the making of religious images to represent God. Secondly, he vehemently denounced the giving of honour due to God to these or any other images¹. I looked in detail at the reasons for Calvin's injunctions against these practices and then went on to establish what the limits of his injunctions were. Here, I suggested that Calvin recognized that the problem lay not so much with images themselves, but rather with an innate desire in man to know God (Calvin's *semen religionis*) which has been perverted by the Fall². However, rather than rejecting the images, and, as we have seen in the history of the Reformed tradition, works of visual art more generally, I suggest that we should be concerned with addressing man's desire. If we manage this appropriately, then there are, in the first instance, two categories of art which are suitable for use in Reformed churches to-day: histories and landscapes.

¹ *Institutes* I, xi, 12, and John Calvin, 'Catechism of the Church of Geneva', in: *Tracts and Treatises on the Reformation of the Church by John Calvin, Vol. II*, H. Beveridge (trans.), Thomas F. Torrance (ed.) (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), pp. 33-94, at p. 58. Here again, as in Chapter One, we should remember that there is a sense in which we cannot be rigid in our use of terminology, for the extent to which a work of art may also be a religious image depends in part on the attitude of the viewer. For a recent account of the role of the viewer in shaping the visual environment, see: David Morgan, *The Sacred Gaze: Religious Visual Culture in Theory and Practice* (London: University of California Press, 2005). I thank Jolyon Mitchell for bringing this reference to my attention.

² *Institutes* I, iv, I, and Eire, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

Finally in Chapter One, I examined Calvin's arguments for the removal of *all* works of art³ from churches, based on the three-fold authority of the early church, the Church Fathers and the New Testament. In each case, we found that Calvin's arguments were not sufficiently compelling and decided that we should therefore not conclude with him that they provide adequate grounds for keeping works of art out of churches.

So, having addressed Calvin's arguments against the use of visual art in churches in Chapter One, in this chapter I turn to the question of whether we can find arguments within other aspects of his theology for the introduction of appropriate works of art into churches. Several recent scholars have suggested ways forward here. J. J. Snyman writes, 'I feel that one of the most fruitful linking points for a contemporary aesthetics in a Christian Reformed community is to be found in Calvin's vision of the vocation of man, and of human work'⁴. This idea of developing an aesthetic based on man's calling is also expressed by others writing in the Reformed or Calvinist tradition⁵. Although they do not explicitly refer to Calvin's own work, both Hans Rookmaaker and Nicholas Wolterstorff both reflect the influence of the Reformed tradition on them when they suggest, like Snyman, that vocation is a useful starting point for the development of a Christian aesthetic. Wolterstorff, in particular, sees vocation in terms of responsibility and argues that those whose vocation it is to be artists have a responsibility not only to themselves,

³ See Chapter One, n. 104, where I discuss Calvin's use of the word *imagines* in *Institutes* I, xi, 13.

⁴ J. J. Snyman, 'Calvin on Art: Calvin Defended against (Some of) His Supporters' in: *Calvinus Reformator* (1982), pp. 300-313, at p. 311.

⁵ For an introduction to the relationship between Calvin and Calvinism on one hand, and the Reformed tradition and its theology on the other, see: Alistair Mason, 'Reformed Theology' in: Adrian Hastings et al. (eds.), *Oxford Companion to Christian Thought* (henceforth *OCCT*) (Oxford: OUP, 2000), pp. 603-4.

but also to their fellow human-beings, to God's creation and to God himself. The responsible artist, he says, will produce art which respects all these relationships⁶.

In his book *Hearing the Word in a Visual Age*, in which he argues for the use of visual works of art in the preaching of Reformed churches, David Schuringa offers several other fruitful avenues of investigation⁷. The first is that, as I note in Chapter One, Calvin did in fact see paintings and sculptures as the result of a gift from God⁸. Indeed, as Schuringa points out, Calvin quotes the example of Bezalel and Oholiab (Ex. 31 and 35), who were filled with the Spirit of God when they constructed the tabernacle⁹.

The second avenue of investigation offered by Schuringa is based on one aspect of Calvin's principle of accommodation. This tells us that churches can adapt their practices to suit the particular social and cultural situations in which they find themselves¹⁰. In this regard, Schuringa writes,

It can be reasoned that if man's communication structures are visual in character (and he argues that this is the case in the contemporary world), and this is a critical feature of the human capacity for understanding, some accommodation to a visual form of communication in the service of the revelation of God's person and

⁶ Hans Rookmaaker, *Christianity and Art* (Potchefstroom: Instituut vir Reformatoriese Studie, 1985), pp. 18-19. Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Art in Action: Toward a Christian Aesthetic* (Carlisle: Solway, 1997), pp. 72-8.

⁷ H. David Schuringa, *Hearing the Word in a Visual Age* (Ph.D. thesis) (Kampen: Kampen Theological University, 1995).

⁸ *Institutes* I, xi, 12.

⁹ *Institutes* II, ii, 16. See also: John Calvin, *Commentaries on The Four Last Books of Moses, Arranged in the Form of a Harmony, Vol. III*, C. W. Bingham (trans. and ed.) (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1854), pp. 296-7.

¹⁰ *Institutes* IV, x, 30. Schuringa, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-8.

*will, would not only be permissible, but required*¹¹.

A third way forward that Schuringa describes, which I feel springs from the same principle of accommodation as the above, is that Calvin shifted the emphasis from image to word so radically because he felt that the historical situation demanded it. He thought that whereas there was a surfeit of religious images in his time, which may also have been an expression of doctrines to which he was opposed, the preaching of the Word was by contrast not as central to worship as it should have been. So, what Calvin saw as an extreme situation required extreme action. However, today the situation is different and requires a different approach¹².

Finally, I must mention two other streams of development of a Christian aesthetic, one originating in the Netherlands, the other in France, which would both claim a Calvinist inheritance. The first stream is that of the 'neo-Calvinists', beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century with Abraham Kuyper and continuing with Herman Bavinck, Herman Dooyeweerd, Hans Rookmaaker, mentioned above, and more recently Calvin Seerveld, all of whose approaches to aesthetics are discussed by Jeremy Begbie in *Voicing Creation's Praise*¹³. I do not develop their ideas here, as, although they clearly stand within the Calvinist tradition, they make little reference to the works of Calvin himself in developing their particular aesthetics. That said, the fact that they do stand in the Calvinist

¹¹ Schuringa, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

¹² *ibid.*, pp. 138-143.

¹³ Jeremy Begbie, *Voicing Creation's Praise* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991). For a discussion of the origin of the term 'neo-Calvinist', see Begbie, pp. 81-83. For a further refinement of Seerveld's position within the neo-Calvinist tradition, see: Craig Bartholomew and Gideon Strauss, 'Bread and not Stones. An Introduction to the Thought of Calvin Seerveld' in: Craig Bartholomew (ed.), *In the Fields of the Lord: A Seerveld Reader* (Carlisle: Piquant, 2000), pp. 3-22, at p. 3 n. 1.

tradition allows me to engage with them at certain points as conversation partners, in particular Rookmaaker and Seerveld.

I do, however, engage more actively with the development of a Calvinist aesthetic by representatives of the stream originating in France, in particular Léon Wencelius and, more recently, Jérôme Cottin¹⁴. Both these scholars make much more direct reference to Calvin's work and in this chapter I make particular use of their discussion of Calvin's understanding of beauty. For I suggest that his understanding of beauty is intrinsic to a larger aspect of his thought, which is for modern scholars the key to unlocking Calvin's theology: his epistemology, and more specifically the knowledge of God¹⁵.

The Framework of Calvin's Epistemology

The first and arguably most important point to bear in mind when discussing Calvin's doctrine of the knowledge of God is that he goes to great lengths to affirm the absolute transcendence of God and his total 'otherness' in relation to man: for Calvin, there must be no 'mixing' of the divine and the human¹⁶. A consequence of this is that we should not

¹⁴ In particular, I refer to the following two works: Léon Wencelius, *L'esthétique de Jean Calvin* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1979) (a reprint of the Paris edition of 1937), and Jérôme Cottin, *Le Regard et la Parole: Une théologie protestante de l'image* (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 1994) (see also Chapter One). Note that although the Dutch neo-Calvinist and French streams seem to a large extent to have developed independently, they do on occasion make reference to each other. See for example: Wencelius, p. 5, and Emile Doumergue, *L'art et le Sentiment dans l'oeuvre de Calvin* (Geneva: Slatkine Reprints, 1970), pp. 10 and 44. In all of these examples, reference is made to the Dutch neo-Calvinist, Abraham Kuyper.

¹⁵ Richard C. Gamble, 'Current Trends in Calvin Research, 1982-90' in: Wilhelm H. Neuser (ed.), *Calvinus Sacrae Scripturae Professor, Calvin as Confessor of Holy Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 91-112, at pp. 105-7. William Bouwsma argues that the reason Calvin gives so much importance to epistemology in *Institutes* is that in the sixteenth century a debate was raging as to whether the human mind was capable of having any certain knowledge. See: William J. Bouwsma, 'Calvin and the Renaissance Crisis of Knowing' in: *Calvin Theological Journal*, Vol. 17: 2 (1982), pp. 190-211, at p. 190.

¹⁶ François Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of his Religious Thought*, Philip Mairet (trans.) (London: Collins, 1963), pp. 150 ff. For a more detailed discussion of the reasons why Calvin

engage in what Calvin calls 'speculation' about God's essence. For Calvin, there is no value in asking the question *Quis est Deus*, and we should note that he does not say this in isolation, but is rather following here an opinion held widely amongst the Church Fathers¹⁷.

So, if we cannot know God's essence, what according to Calvin is the knowledge of God? In *Institutes*, he tells us that the Lord manifests himself by his powers (*virtutes*), or works (*opera*), and that rather than investigating his essence, we should 'contemplate him in his works whereby he renders himself near and familiar to us, and in some manner communicates himself'¹⁸.

Another way of considering this aspect of Calvin's epistemology is provided by the Dutch theologian Cornelis van der Kooi¹⁹. He argues that the metaphor of the mirror is central to Calvin's thought on the knowledge of God. Just as in a mirror we see, and to the pre-modern mind know, a reflection of the original object rather than the object itself, so when we see God's works, our view of him is mediated and we see him, and thus know him, not directly but indirectly²⁰. By way of further explanation, van der Kooi argues that the

goes to great lengths to stress God's transcendence, see Chapter Four.

¹⁷ Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, p. 152, and *Institutes* I, v, 9. See also: Edward A. Dowey Jr., *The Knowledge of God in Calvin's Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), pp. 27-28, and Heiko Oberman, 'Initia Calvini: The Matrix of Calvin's Reformation' in: Wilhelm H. Neuser (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 113-154, at p. 125.

¹⁸ Latin: *ut illum in suis operibus contemplemur, quibus se propinquum nobis familiaremque reddit ac quodammodo communicat.* (CR XXX, CO II, p. 47). *Institutes* I, v, 9. See also Dowey, *op. cit.*, p. 28, and Chapter One.

¹⁹ Cornelis van der Kooi, *op. cit.*

²⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 59-62. Here, van der Kooi enumerates the qualities of a mirror that make it an appropriate metaphor for Calvin to use in describing how God makes himself known to man. For a detailed discussion of the medieval use of the metaphor of the mirror, see: Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass: Mirror-imagery in titles and texts of the Middle Ages and English Renaissance*, Gordon Collier (trans.) (Cambridge: CUP, 1982), and, with particular reference to the relationship between this metaphor and the

metaphor of the mirror is directly related to the idea of *imitatio* as an epistemological principle. According to this idea, the knowledge gained from a representation or imitation of a given reality was considered trustworthy, although not as complete as that gained from the reality itself. Likewise, seeing an image in a mirror was considered to be trustworthy, although never as clear as beholding the original²¹.

So, having looked at how the metaphor of mirror works, let us now consider in detail the various mirrors in which we can, according to Calvin, contemplate God's works. We begin with God's creation and providence²². Chapter Five of *Institutes* Book I is entitled 'The Knowledge of God Shines Forth in the Fashioning of the Universe and the Continuing Government of it'²³. In his preface to the Bible of Olivétan, Calvin writes, 'In every part of the world, in heaven and on earth, [God] has written and as it were engrave[d] the glory of his power, goodness, wisdom and eternity'²⁴. It is interesting to note that the Reformer seems to have developed his understanding of providence very much within the framework of classical thought, and we might get a better understanding

visual arts, see: E. Panofsky, *Idea: A Concept in Art Theory*, J. S. Peake (trans.) (Berlin: Verlag Bruno Hessling, 1960).

²¹ van der Kooi, *op. cit.*, pp. 58 and 60.

²² In his discussion of the means by which God accommodates himself to us, van der Kooi does not explicitly mention providence as one of the mirrors by which Calvin suggests that God reveals himself to his people. However, it is clear that we may consider it as such. Indeed, as van der Kooi himself writes elsewhere, providence is how God interacts with his creation and he discusses how we experience this in his justice (pp. 135 ff.). Professor van der Kooi re-iterated this point in a conversation with me at the *Vrije Universiteit* on Thursday, 28th April, 2005. In addition, we may deduce from Calvin's own writings that he saw providence as a mirror by which God reveals his works to us. In *Institutes* I, v, 11, he writes 'the Lord represents both himself and his everlasting Kingdom in the mirror of his works' and goes on immediately to discuss both God's creation and his providence.

²³ Latin: *Dei notitiam in mundi fabrica et continua eius gubernatione lucere.* (CR.XXX, CO II, p. 41).

²⁴ French: ... en toutes les parties du monde, au ciel, et en la terre, il a écrit et quasi engravé la gloire de sa puissance, bonté, sapience, et éternité. Latin: ... in singulis partibus istius universi sursum ac deorsum insculptas reliquit atque expressas gloriae, potentiae, bonitatis, sapientiae, aeternitatis significantissimas inscriptiones. (CR.XXXVII, CO IX, pp. 793-4).

of how he believed that God relates to his creation by comparing his position with some of those we find in antiquity. For example, although he affirmed the transcendence of God, Calvin rejected the Epicurean notion of a distant God, not actively involved in his creation. Rather, he preferred the Stoic idea of a providential God. That said, he rejected Stoic pantheism, and determined that God is a transcendental and providential God - one totally 'other' than man and the rest of his creation, though actively involved in it throughout history²⁵.

But although God chooses to reveal himself in his creation and providence²⁶, as a result of the Fall, Calvin argues that we cannot, in the first instance, know God through these works²⁷. However, all is not lost, for through the mediation of Christ, whom we know through the revelation of the Scriptures, Calvin argues that we can again see God's works, albeit imperfectly, in his creation and providence²⁸.

Nature, then, in a broad sense, is one means by which God reveals or accommodates himself to human understanding²⁹. As a result of the Fall, we can only recognize this as God's work through the mediation of Christ and Scripture. But as well as being the means through which we can know that God is the source of creation and providence, Christ and Scripture are for Calvin also forms of accommodation, or mirrors, in which we

²⁵ Susan E. Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory: Nature and the Natural Order in the Thought of John Calvin* (Durham, N. C.: The Labyrinth Press, 1991), pp. 16 ff. See also: van der Kooi, *op. cit.*, pp. 127-30, and pp. 41-42 above.

²⁶ Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, pp. 161-2.

²⁷ Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, p. 163, and Cottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 305 ff. See also *Institutes* I, ii, 1, and I, v, 11.

²⁸ Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, pp. 164-5, and Schreiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 106 ff. See also *Institutes* II, vi, 1.

²⁹ van der Kooi, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

can contemplate God, in their own right³⁰. Of Christ, who represents the highest form of accommodation, Calvin writes, 'holy men of old knew God only by beholding him in his Son as in a mirror'³¹. He uses the metaphor of Christ as a mirror again when discussing the doctrine of election. He says, 'Augustine wisely notes this: namely, that we have in the very Head of the church the clearest mirror of free election that we who are among the members may not be troubled about it'³². Likewise, Calvin uses the metaphor of the mirror to describe Scripture. In *Institutes*, Book I, he asks the reader to remember that God 'sets before us Moses' history as a mirror in which his living likeness glows', and elsewhere he also refers to the Mosaic Law as a mirror³³.

So, creation, including providence, Scripture and Christ are three of the mirrors, or modes of accommodation, by which Calvin argues that God reveals himself to us. A fourth mirror that he discusses is the sacraments. For example, in *Institutes*, Book IV Calvin writes, 'we might call [the sacraments] mirrors in which we may contemplate the riches of God's grace, which he lavishes upon us'³⁴. This is of particular importance as Calvin's understanding of the sacraments provides us with another possible way forward in attempting to introduce works of visual art into churches in the Reformed tradition.

³⁰ *ibid.*, p. 62. As van der Kooi notes, there is a particularly close connection between these two 'mirrors'. For, in this way of thinking, Christ is the image that one sees in the mirror of Scripture, and one cannot see one without beholding the other. See also: Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, p. 160, where the idea of Scripture as a mirror is discussed.

³¹ *Institutes* IV, viii, 5.

³² *ibid.*, III, xxii, 1.

³³ *ibid.*, I, xiv, 1 and II, vii, 7. It is also worth noting that Calvin refers to the Word as a mirror and this includes both Christ and Scripture. See *Institutes* III, ii, 6, and Calvin's commentary on I Cor. 13: 12 in: John Calvin, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians*, J. W. Fraser (trans.), D. W. and T. F. Torrance (eds.) (London: Oliver and Boyd, 1960), p. 281 f.

³⁴ *Institutes* IV, xiv, 6.

But, before looking specifically at the application of Calvin's epistemology to the question of the use of visual works of art in churches, we need to look at another aspect of his thought on the knowledge of God. So far, I have looked at the means by which the knowledge of God is mediated to us: creation and providence, Scripture, Christ and the sacraments. Now, I turn to look at how the knowing subject apprehends this knowledge. There are, in fact, two dimensions to the knowledge of God which need to be discussed in this regard: faith and experience. Although they are distinct, they are closely related and seem, in Calvin's writings, to support each other³⁵.

Let us look firstly at his account of faith. It is clear that Calvin struggles to give a definitive account of what faith is. However, he has no doubt that it is a gift from God³⁶. He also affirms that it is knowledge, although a very particular type of knowledge³⁷. After considerable discussion of the nature of faith in *Institutes*, Book III, Chapter ii, he concludes that it is primarily the certainty or assurance that those who believe are the children of God. Understood thus, faith is not something that can be grasped by the senses or comprehended by the intellect³⁸. That said, Calvin states elsewhere that faith is a developing knowledge of God's will towards us, perceived from his Word, which is to be understood here as both Christ and Scripture³⁹. And here, we begin to see how faith is not merely a static type of knowledge, a never-changing certainty, but also something that dynamically interacts with God's modes of accommodation. For example, in relation to

³⁵ Charles Partee, *Calvin and Classical Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), pp. 37-41.

³⁶ *Institutes* III, ii, 35.

³⁷ *ibid.*, III, ii, 14.

³⁸ *ibid.*, III, ii, 14 and 15.

³⁹ *ibid.*, III, ii, 6. See also notes 30 and 33 above.

the sacraments, faith allows us to obtain the benefits of the Lord's Supper, and it, in turn, is increased when we receive these benefits⁴⁰. So, we see that for Calvin faith is characterized both by certainty but also by change, as it meets and interacts with God as he reveals himself to us⁴¹.

As far as experience is concerned, Calvin does not treat it on its own, nor does he give a definitive statement of what it is. However, a reasonable definition, based on his own use of the term, is that experience is the point at which those with faith encounter God primarily, but not exclusively, in his creation and providence and know that this is God's work⁴². Charles Partee puts it thus: 'experience is the arena of human life where events occur which properly understood show that man deals with God in everything'⁴³. But, according to Calvin, for the believer to recognize that what they perceive or experience has been effected by God, they must, as a consequence of the Fall, have faith in Christ as revealed in Scripture⁴⁴. And it is here that we see that faith and experience are, in fact, mutually supportive. Although as we have said Calvin asserts that faith has the characteristic of certainty, he is also willing to acknowledge that it can at times be less

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, IV, xvii, 5, and IV, xiv, 7.

⁴¹ A further aspect of Calvin's understanding of faith seems to be the idea of assent to given propositions, such as the fact that we must accept Scripture as the means by which we know the object of our faith, Christ.

⁴² I qualify my definition of experience with the words 'primarily, but not exclusively' as there is clearly a meeting of faith and experience when we encounter Scripture and the sacraments and it is by no means clear where one ends and the other begins in these situations.

⁴³ Partee, *op. cit.*, p. 38. See also: van der Kooi, *op. cit.*, p. 133. Here, van der Kooi writes that for Calvin, 'God's goodness and providence is not just a theologoumenon that one can discover only from Scripture; Calvin's premise is that it is confirmed in everyday experience'. For further discussion of Calvin's understanding of experience, see also: van der Kooi, pp. 76-7 and 136-8.

⁴⁴ Schreiner, *op. cit.*, p. 106 f.

than certain. In these cases, experience can sustain faith⁴⁵. Likewise, when experience may make us feel that God has turned against us, faith can assure us that God is eternally reconciled to us⁴⁶. Faith and experience, then, lie at the heart of Calvin's epistemology. In a moment, I will begin to look at how we can apply his ideas about the knowledge of God to art, but before I do this, it is worth reflecting on the fact that his epistemology is profoundly eschatological.

The knowledge of God involves a process, a process of growth, the object of which is union with Christ⁴⁷. In his discussion on the nature of faith, Calvin refers to Ephesians 4: 13 and Colossians 3: 10, both of which describe a process whose end is to become fully Christ-like⁴⁸. As T. F. Torrance writes in his introduction to H. Quistorp's *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, 'because we are united to Christ and participate in His risen humanity, eschatology is essential to our faith'⁴⁹. And here again, we find another aspect of Calvin's theology which, as I will attempt to demonstrate, can be used to support the introduction of appropriate works of visual art into Reformed churches.

The application of Calvin's epistemology and eschatology to the use of works of visual art in Reformed churches

So, it is now time to look at how we can use Calvin's epistemology and eschatology to support the introduction of works of visual art into Reformed churches. But, we should

⁴⁵ See: Calvin's Commentary on Joel 3: 17 (*CR LXX, CO XLII*, p. 596).

⁴⁶ See: Calvin's Commentary on Isaiah 14: 1, (*CR LXIV, CO XXXVI*, p. 273).

⁴⁷ *Institutes* III, ii, 30. See also Dowey, *op. cit.*, pp. 153-4.

⁴⁸ *Institutes* III, ii, 14.

⁴⁹ Heinrich Quistorp, *Calvin's Doctrine of the Last Things*, Harold Knight (trans.) (London: Lutterworth Press, 1955), p. 8. Van der Kooi also notes that for Calvin an eschatological structure characterizes all human knowledge of God. Indeed, he suggests that the metaphor of mirror functions well within this structure. See: van der Kooi, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

begin by noting that this is by no means a straightforward task. For example, in the first instance it may seem that using Calvin's metaphor of mirror may not be a good idea since art is not one of the means, or 'mirrors', by which he tells us that God reveals himself to us⁵⁰. Although he does admit that God may reveal himself through visible signs, such as the pillar of cloud by which he led the Israelites out of Egypt, for Calvin what sets works of visual art apart from these signs is that man is involved in their design. This also distinguishes works of art from the mirrors of Christ, Scripture, creation and providence, and the sacraments, as these are, from his perspective, unmediated means by which God makes himself known⁵¹. However, this is not the end of the matter, for we may find a way forward through another aspect of Calvin's epistemology: experience. Although not a mirror in itself, we may consider experience as the contemplation of the evidence of God provided by the mirrors⁵². I suggest that works of art, including paintings and sculptures, may be seen as a means by which we can record and communicate our experience of God's self-revelation. So, a landscape painting can record our experience of the mirror of creation and a history can likewise reflect our experience of God's providence or how we perceive the history of his people as recorded in Scripture. It may seem that this takes us too far from any knowledge of God as the artist now stands between God's revelation and the beholder⁵³. However, it is the role of the artist, and indeed as Nicholas Wolterstorff

⁵⁰ van der Kooi, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-1.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 59 and 62.

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 76.

⁵³ van der Kooi, *op. cit.*, pp. 332-3, and Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, Edmund Jephcott (trans.), (London: University of Chicago Press, 1994), p. 16.

might say, his or her responsibility⁵⁴, to draw the attention of the viewer to the fact that what they behold is a representation of the work of God. I describe how the artist does this in more detail below, but suffice to say here that by stripping away non-essential detail, he or she can help the viewer to focus on the fact that the features of creation and providence that they are depicting in a landscape or a history are the work of God⁵⁵. And let us not forget that for Calvin, God's spirit may be actively involved in the creation of a work of art⁵⁶. For example, with reference to Exodus 31 and 35, which I mentioned earlier in relation to the work of David Schuringa⁵⁷, Calvin says 'the understanding and knowledge of Bezalel and Oholiab, needed to construct the Tabernacle, had to be instilled in them by the Spirit of God'. So, despite the fact that works of art may not be seen as a means by which God reveals himself to the world, although this should by no means be discounted in every case, they do provide us with a means by which we can communicate how he is at work in the world⁵⁸.

So, we see that one aspect of Calvin's epistemology, his account of experience, can provide us with arguments which support the use of visual art. Let us now return to the 'mirrors' or modes of accommodation discussed above and see whether, despite the fact

⁵⁴ Wolterstorff (1997), *op. cit.*, pp. 72-8.

⁵⁵ See pp. 55-56 and 60-61 below.

⁵⁶ In relation to the freedom of the Holy Spirit, Calvin writes, 'we ought not to forget those most excellent benefits of the divine Spirit, which he distributes to whomever he wills...' (*Institutes* II, ii, 16). Elsewhere he says, 'if we regard the Spirit of God as the sole fountain of truth, we shall neither reject the truth itself, not despise it *wherever it shall appear*, unless we wish to dishonour the Spirit of God' (*Institutes* II, ii, 15). Indeed, the Spirit blows where it will and this includes inspiring works of art. See: Patrick Sherry, *Spirit and Beauty* (Oxford: OUP, 1992), pp. 85 and 89.

⁵⁷ See p. 38 above.

⁵⁸ van der Kooi (*op. cit.*, p. 80) suggests that it is man's attempts to involve himself in the means of God's self-revelation that provides the background for what some see as idolatry.

that art is excluded from this category, this aspect of Calvin's epistemology can also afford us a way of validating works of visual art.

The Sacraments

The first of the mirrors I want to look at is the sacraments, and although Calvin does admit of two sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, it is only the latter to which I now refer⁵⁹. I suggest that by comparing his understanding of the ontology of the elements of the Lord's Supper with more recent accounts of the ontology of art, we can begin to argue for a positive appreciation of visual works of art. It is interesting to note that whereas Calvin saw works of art used in religious contexts, i.e. religious images⁶⁰, as being one with what they represent⁶¹, he saw the sacraments as signs or a system of signs, pointing beyond themselves to other realities⁶². That said, he did see that the sacraments do in fact have something in common with what they represent, and we should note that this understanding of sacraments is similar to the understanding of visual works of art described by modern commentators such as Cottin and those from other academic fields,

⁵⁹ *Institutes* IV, xiv, 22. For valuable accounts of how Calvin's understanding of the Lord's Supper can be used to argue for a positive appreciation of visual art within the Calvinist tradition, see Cottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 296 ff., and Karl A. Plank, 'Of Unity and Distinction. An Exploration of the Theology of John Calvin with Respect to the Christian stance toward Art', *Calvin Theological Journal* 13, (1978), pp. 16-37, to which Cottin makes reference. Although Plank's article provides much original thinking, it does only provide a starting point, rather than a conclusive argument in this debate.

⁶⁰ I discuss the difficulties in providing a purely objective definition of religious images in Chapter One.

⁶¹ Cottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-7 and 288-9. See also Green, *op. cit.*, p. 96. Green makes the point that for Calvin it is man who ascribes divine power to images and it is this that collapses the image and what it represents into one.

⁶² Cottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 288-9. For example, in *Institutes* IV, xiv, 1, Calvin writes, 'First, we must consider what a sacrament is. It seems to me that a simple and proper definition would be to say that it is an outward sign by which the Lord seals on our consciences the promises of his good will toward us in order to sustain the weakness of our faith'.

such as the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss⁶³.

For example, the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper are not arbitrary signs, as, for instance words often are, but rather share some of the qualities of what they represent. The wine served at Communion is usually red, the colour of blood, and not white. That said, for Calvin the bread and wine are not, nor do they contain, Christ's body and blood, and so are still distinct from what they represent. Likewise, although works of visual art are ontologically distinct from what they represent, there may be a deep homology between them and what they represent. For example, a landscape may be visually similar to the part of the countryside which it depicts. As Claude Lévi-Strauss notes, when comparing works of art with words,

*Human language is a system of arbitrary signs, without a perceptible relationship to the objects that it purports to signify, whilst in art, a perceptible relationship continues to exist between the sign and the object*⁶⁴.

That said, there are clear differences between the sacraments and works of art. The first is that the Lord's Supper was specifically instituted by Christ as recorded in Scripture⁶⁵. One could counter this argument by pointing to God's ongoing revelation, but I think it would

⁶³ Cottin, *op. cit.*, p. 18, and Georges Charbonnier, *Entretiens avec Claude Lévi-Strauss* (Paris: Les Editions Plon, 1961), p. 128.

⁶⁴ French: *Le langage articulé est un système de signes arbitraires, sans rapport sensible avec les objets qu'il se propose de signifier, tandis que, dans l'art, une relation sensible continue d'exister entre le signe et l'objet.* (My translation). Charbonnier, *op. cit.*, p. 133. Note also that at one point (*Institutes* IV, xiv, 5), Calvin refers to the elements of the Lord's Supper as pictures. See also *Institutes* IV, xiv, 6, where Calvin writes, 'Augustine calls a sacrament "a visible word" for the reason that it represents God's promises as painted in a picture (*in tabula depictae*) and sets them before our sight, portrayed graphically and in the manner of images' (*Institutes* IV, xiv, 6). This is more than likely a rhetorical flourish on Calvin's part. However, it does show again that Calvin had a more positive attitude to the visual arts than a cursory reading of *Institutes* might suggest.

⁶⁵ For example, Luke 22: 14 ff.

be too far removed from the orthodox Calvinist position to cease making a special case for the Lord's Supper. The second difference between the sacrament and works of art is that through the work of the Holy Spirit, the bread and the wine in the Lord's Supper bring us into communion with the body and blood of the risen Christ in the *sursum corda*⁶⁶. In other words, the bread and wine 'present what they represent'⁶⁷. By contrast, we would not expect pictures of the elements of the Lord's Supper to 'present what they represent'. But having said that, such pictures can call to mind our experience of the Lord's Supper and even call to mind Christ and his work in our lives. In this regard, I wonder if some of the practices in late medieval piety that Calvin saw as idolatrous were rather the mere calling to mind of God with the aid of a devotional image⁶⁸. This said, there is perhaps a fine line between calling God or his actions to mind and expecting that he would be present whenever we contemplate a representation of him. And here we begin to see that we might compromise God's freedom as it would be we who would be deciding when he presents himself and not him. So, we are reminded of the need to exercise great care when dealing with works of visual art, particularly in a religious context⁶⁹. However, let us not forget that sculpture and painting can be inspired by the Holy Spirit⁷⁰, and that they are gifts from God⁷¹.

One final way in which the sacraments can provide support for the production of works of

⁶⁶ B. A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude, The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), pp. 135-9.

⁶⁷ B. A. Gerrish, 'Calvin, John' in: *OCCT, op. cit.*, pp. 90-93, at p. 92.

⁶⁸ For a brief overview of these practices and references for further reading, see Chapter One.

⁶⁹ Green, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁷⁰ *Institutes* II, ii, 16.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, I, xi, 12.

art is that, as Karl Plank notes, the elements of the Lord's Supper can provide us with a paradigm 'for understanding the way in which the Christian should respond to "earthly elements"'72. By this, we mean that the use of bread and wine tells us that we should affirm the created or material order, which, of course, includes works of art. This point finds an echo in Geoffrey Wainwright's article 'Eucharist'. He writes, 'living eucharistically, human beings begin to fulfil the vocation of humankind to be "the priests of the cosmic sacrament"'73. God gave us the world as a gift and it our responsibility to care for it, and to use it to his praise and glory.

Creation and Providence

So, there are several ways in which we can appropriate Calvin's understanding of the sacraments to build an argument for the use of art in churches. Let us now turn to another of Calvin's mirrors: creation, which I broaden to include God's providence74, and then move on to look at how his other two mirrors, Christ, and Scripture, through which Christ is revealed, can be used to develop a Calvinist aesthetic.

The starting point for this discussion is Calvin's assertion that all that God does, in both creation and providence, is replete with beauty75. This term has a long and varied pedigree, so it is worthwhile taking a closer look at what precisely Calvin means when he uses it. It seems that his use of the term has something in common with that of the neo-

⁷² Plank, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

⁷³ Geoffrey Wainwright, 'Eucharist', in: *OCCT*, *op. cit.*, pp. 214-6, at p. 216.

⁷⁴ See n. 22 above.

⁷⁵ Wencelius, *op. cit.*, p. 92. See also *Institutes* I, v, 1-4.

Platonists, such as Marsilio Ficino⁷⁶. For them, God is Absolute Beauty. We can see rays of his beauty, and goodness, in creation. This leads the soul to contemplate an inner, suprasensible beauty and eventually leads it upwards to the Absolute Beauty⁷⁷. As we shall see, Calvin agrees with the neo-Platonists that we see divine rays of beauty in creation⁷⁸, and that there exists a suprasensible beauty, exemplified by the character and actions of Christ⁷⁹. But, Calvin seems to differ from Ficino in two important respects. First, whereas for Ficino the process of drawing the soul back to God is one of redemption, for Calvin the soul is already redeemed by election and so beauty, both external and suprasensible, provides instead the means for sanctification⁸⁰. Secondly, for Ficino the Fall seems to have a less deleterious effect on our ability to see beauty in God's creation than it does for Calvin⁸¹. This emphasis on the Fall means that for Calvin we can only see this beauty anew by means of God's Word. So, with these points in mind, let us now look at how visual art can help us to engage with the beauty in God's creative and providential works as defined by Calvin.

⁷⁶ Calvin may have learnt of these neo-Platonic ideas through either a direct acquaintance with the Christian humanist Jacques Lefèvre d'Étaples, an acquaintance with those who followed d'Étaples, such as Guillaume Farel, or a knowledge of his works. However, more research would need to be carried out to secure a firm link between Ficino and Calvin. See: Ganoczy, *op. cit.*, pp. 49 ff., and Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, pp. 20, 40-2 and 53.

⁷⁷ Michael J. Allen, 'Life as a Dead Platonist', in: M. J. B. Allen, V. Rees et al. (eds.), *Marsilio Ficino: His Theology, His Philosophy, His Legacy* (Leiden: Brill, 2002), pp. 159-78, at p. 164. I thank Ann Moss for bringing this work to my attention. See also: Umberto Eco, *On Beauty: A History of a Western Idea*, Alastair McEwen (trans.) (London: Secker & Warburg, 2004), pp. 176-86. For the neo-Platonists, the soul's journey is a return to its source, as they considered it to be immortal. Calvin also considered the soul to be immortal. (See: Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, pp. 173-7).

⁷⁸ *Institutes* I, v, 1.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, II, xv, 4.

⁸⁰ Cottin, *op. cit.*, p. 309 f., and Jörg Lauster, 'Marsilio Ficino as a Christian Thinker: Theological Aspects of His Platonism' in: M. J. B. Allen, V. Rees et al. (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 45-69, at pp. 58-64.

⁸¹ Lauster, *op. cit.*, pp. 48 ff., and 58 ff., and *Institutes* I, v, 11.

The first aspect of this beauty that I want us to consider is that which can be apprehended by the senses, particularly the sense of sight. This aspect of beauty is characterized by harmony and order and speaks in particular of God's wisdom. As Calvin himself notes in a typically lyrical flourish,

*Wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of [God's] glory. You cannot in one glance survey this most vast and beautiful system of the universe, in its wide expanse, without being completely overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness*⁸².

For Calvin, it is the 'beautiful system of the universe' or, as he goes on to describe it, 'this skilful ordering of the universe', which can be seen, for example, in the motion of the stars, that speaks of God's wisdom⁸³. Another manifestation for Calvin of God's wisdom in the created order is the structure of the human body⁸⁴. The artist can help us to apprehend this beauty by a process of what E. John Walford calls 'selective naturalness'⁸⁵. Rather than merely copying exactly what they see, the artist makes a choice about what to depict, in order to communicate more clearly what they believe to be the reality underlying what is represented. One artist, in whose work this process is evident, is the Dutch

⁸² *Institutes* I, v, 1.

⁸³ *ibid.* See also: van der Kooi, *op. cit.*, pp. 134-5, where we learn that Calvin's picture of the universe was shaped by the geocentric picture of the cosmos, constructed according to Aristotelian concepts, which pre-dated the important discoveries about the structure of the cosmos by Tycho Brahe, Galileo Galilei and others. This means that Calvin would have believed that there is more order in the cosmos than we might do today. See also Chapter Seven.

⁸⁴ *Institutes* I, v, 2. See also Wencelius, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-32. In art, a good example of a picture which portrays the wonder of the human body is Rembrandt's *The Anatomy Lecture of Dr. Nicolaes Tulp* (Bredius Catalogue No. 403). See: A. Bredius, *Rembrandt: The Complete Edition of Paintings*, 3rd edition, H. Gerson (revised) (London: Phaidon, 1969), p. 317.

⁸⁵ E. John Walford, *op. cit.*, pp. 20 and 28. See also: C. G. Geluk, *Geest en cultuur: Een theologisch onderzoek naar creativiteit in het licht van de visie van Calvijn op cultuur* (Proefschrift), (Zoetemeer: Uitgeverij Boekcentrum, 2003), p. 240. See also Chapter One.

landscape artist, Jacob van Ruisdael. He uses this 'selective naturalness' to emphasize to the viewer the underlying reality that the world was created by God and is subject to his continuing providence⁸⁶. In particular, he re-orders the elements in a scene, such as trees or human figures, so as to create a compositional unity and emphasize the underlying harmony and order in creation, which bespeak the beauty of God⁸⁷.

This, then, provides us with an introduction to the external beauty which points us towards God. Now let us turn to the second aspect of the beauty of God which Calvin discusses, namely suprasensible, or inner, beauty. This is a divine beauty which is not defined by external order and harmony, but is rather one that is embedded in personal character. It may be accessed visually, or by other senses such as the aural, but its beauty content lies beyond and not in the visual. That said, this beauty, like the external beauty just discussed, bespeaks God's wisdom and providential care for the world, as well as his justice.

Let us look at the first of these: God's wisdom. Calvin writes that this wisdom is hidden deep within God's work, but that it has 'been published to be searched out' by man⁸⁸. In his work *The Prophetess Anna Reading the Bible* (plate 1), the artist Rembrandt brilliantly expresses how the prophetess, based, some scholars say, on Rembrandt's own experience

⁸⁶ See Chapter Seven, where I discuss van Ruisdael's work *Het Korenveld* ('The Wheatfield') in detail. See: Seymour Slive, *Jacob van Ruisdael, A Complete Catalogue of His Paintings Drawings and Etchings* (London: Yale University Press, 2001), p. 128.

⁸⁷ *Institutes* I, v, 1. Maarten de Klijn argues that atmospheric and compositional unity in seventeenth-century Dutch landscape painting are two of the features that reflect a specifically Calvinist view of the world. I would add that this is because for Calvin and the Calvinists unity and harmony point us towards God. Maarten de Klijn, *De invloed van het Calvinisme op de Noord-Nederlandse landschapschilderkunst* (Apeldoorn: Willem de Zwijgerstichting, 1982), p. 32. See also Chapter Seven.

⁸⁸ *Institutes* I, xvii, 2. For a discussion of Calvin's understanding of God's justice, see: van der Kooi, *op. cit.*, pp. 136-8.

of watching his mother reading the Bible, has sought out and imbibed God's wisdom⁸⁹. Here, as I note elsewhere,

*Anna is wearing an aesthetically pleasing velvet robe, but it is not [in this] that we find beauty as a manifestation of God's [work]. The eye is inevitably drawn to Anna's face. It is not a face that is beautiful in a sensuous, worldly way. Its beauty lies in its attentiveness to the Bible, its serenity and its deep sense of joy*⁹⁰.

A second aspect of this type of beauty is how God acts in human history, the divine plan⁹¹. The most beautiful aspect of this is that, without meriting it, our sins are forgiven through the death of Christ. Rembrandt captures this wonderfully in the fourth and final state of a series of etchings called *The Three Crosses* (plate 2)⁹². Here, he depicts a horseman, in front of the robber to Jesus' right, in an almost trance-like state. The figure is struck by the sheer magnitude of what he is witnessing and cannot believe how amazing, even beautiful, this work of grace is.

A third and final aspect of this type of beauty, which has much in common with what we may call spiritual beauty, is God's justice, as Calvin himself notes in his commentary on Psalm 111: 3⁹³. Another painting by Rembrandt which captures this aspect of God's

⁸⁹ Bredius Catalogue No. 69 (see: Bredius, *op. cit.*, p. 65). See also: Gary Schwartz, *Rembrandt, His Life, His Paintings* (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1985), p. 102.

⁹⁰ Christopher Joby, 'How does the work of Rembrandt van Rijn represent a Calvinist aesthetic?' in: *Theology*, January/February, 2004, pp. 22-29 at p. 27.

⁹¹ *Institutes* I, xvii, 1.

⁹² Bartsch Catalogue No. 78 IV. See: Christopher White, *Rembrandt as an Etcher: A Study of the Artist at Work*, 2nd edition (London: Yale University Press, 1999), p. 85.

⁹³ John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol. IV, J. Anderson (trans. and ed.) (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1847), p. 314 f.

beauty is *The Woman Caught in Adultery* (plate 3)⁹⁴, based on the account of John 8: 2-

11. In this picture, we see Christ administering God's justice in a manner which startles the scribes and the Pharisees who are accusing the woman of adultery. This picture is also instructive as it provides a clear contrast between the beauty of divine action, i.e. the justice administered by Christ, and what may be seen as worldly beauty, manifest in the opulent background, to which Christ's enemies attached importance⁹⁵.

Indeed as Jérôme Cottin notes, for Calvin it is in the person of Jesus Christ that this inner or 'hidden' beauty is most evident. He reminds us that Calvin talks explicitly of the beauty of Christ⁹⁶, and points out that this beauty is not an external beauty, but a spiritual beauty: 'it is not a question of a formal or physical beauty, but rather of a "spiritual garment"'⁹⁷. He then goes on to list the attributes of Christ's spiritual beauty⁹⁸.

Beauty and Truth

It is perhaps interesting to note, though, that Christ does not refer to himself as beautiful, and the New Testament writers do not use the word to describe him either⁹⁹, although they often use the closely related word 'glory' (δόξα) in relation to him (e.g. Hebrews 1: 3)¹⁰⁰. However, Christ does refer to himself as the Truth, as in John 14: 6, and, as I shall now

⁹⁴ Bredius Catalogue No. 566. See: Bredius, *op. cit.*, p. 480. See also: Schwartz, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

⁹⁵ Joby, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

⁹⁶ Cottin, *op. cit.*, p. 308. See *Institutes* II, xv, 4, where Calvin writes, 'now [Christ] arms and equips us with his power, adorns us with his beauty and magnificence, enriches us with his wealth'.

⁹⁷ *ibid.* French: *il ne s'agit pas d'une beauté formelle ou physique, mais plutôt d'une "parure spirituelle"*. (This and all quotations other from Cottin in English are my translations from the French).

⁹⁸ Cottin, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

⁹⁹ According to Young's *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, there is no use of the word beauty in reference to Christ in the New Testament. See: Robert Young, *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible* (London: Thomas Nelson, 1982), p. 78.

¹⁰⁰ As Wencelius notes, in Calvin's writings there is a close link between his use of the words beauty and glory, as well as splendour. Wencelius, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

discuss, beauty, both that which lies beyond the visual, and also that which is visible in the harmony and order of the world, has something in common with certain definitions of Biblical truth¹⁰¹. For example, Rudolf Bultmann records that one aspect of the New Testament word usually translated as truth, ἀλήθεια, is that of 'Godly revealed reality'¹⁰². For Calvin, the order in the movement of the stars and in the structure of the human body are marks of God's glory or beauty¹⁰³, and they tell us something of what God has chosen to reveal to us¹⁰⁴. The same is true of the justice that is manifest in the acts of Christ. Other definitions of Biblical truth reveal a further important aspect of its content. Calvin Seerveld calls it, 'the most fundamental, the largest, final horizon within which human knowing takes place'¹⁰⁵. In a similar vein, Rudolf Bultmann, providing another definition of ἀλήθεια, describes it as a genuine possibility of human existence¹⁰⁶. Both of these definitions contain an eschatological dimension. This is also present in the concept of beauty as used by Calvin, as it both points us towards God and plays a role in our own

¹⁰¹ For a valuable discussion on the overlap of truth and beauty, see in particular: Hans Rookmaaker, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture* (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1970), pp. 233 ff.

¹⁰² R. Bultmann, 'ἀλήθεια' in: G. Kittel (ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1, A-Γ (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), pp. 232-247, at p. 243.

¹⁰³ As I mention above (see n. 83), it is likely that Calvin's picture of the universe was shaped by the geocentric picture of the cosmos, constructed according to Aristotelian concepts. Our understanding of the universe is different today and although there is a truly remarkable order to the planets in our solar system, there seems to be much less order in the universe as a whole than Calvin and his contemporaries would have thought. Further, whereas in the past the seeming perfection of the human eye might have pointed us towards God, modern science tells us that it is less than perfect and so we might be less inclined to see it as an example of God's action in creation. And again, Calvin does not seem to account for entities in creation that we would find it hard to call beautiful, such as viruses, although we should remember that for Calvin not only has our ability to see order in God's creation been impaired by the Fall, but the order itself has also been affected. That said, I believe there is still sufficient order in many features of creation, albeit imperfect to a greater or lesser degree, to point us to God. See Schreiner, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

¹⁰⁴ *Institutes* I, vi, 1 and 2.

¹⁰⁵ Calvin Seerveld, 'The relation of the arts to the presentation of the truth' in: *Truth and Reality, Philosophical Perspectives on Reality* (Braamfontein: De Jong, 1971), p. 164.

¹⁰⁶ Bultmann, *op. cit.*, p. 245.

sanctification.

It should not surprise us that there is a teleological dimension to the truth. It is the end, or τέλος, of Christians to be united with Christ, who is the Truth and in whom we are exposed to the fullness of God's truth¹⁰⁷. But, how, we must now ask, can art help us to attain to the truth? I mentioned earlier that art works on the basis of 'selective naturalness'¹⁰⁸. It is now time to develop this idea further.

In the first instance it is possible to create art which attempts to be mimetic. However, as Michael Edwards points out, works of art by their very nature already exclude certain dimensions inherent within the reality which they try to represent. Sculptures exclude sound, as do paintings. The latter also exclude, to a greater or lesser degree, volume and movement¹⁰⁹. The artist can take the idea of exclusion further by choosing to represent some things that he or she sees, but to reject others. They can do this and still convince the viewer that what they are seeing is a representation of a possible reality, i.e. that a picture faithfully depicts what is seen in nature. Such is the process of selective naturalness. The value of this process to the current discussion is that by doing away with what one might describe as the extraneous and accidental, the artist takes us closer to permanent truths that may not be immediately evident to someone merely observing the reality that the artist attempts to depict. As S. H. Butcher notes in his commentary on Aristotle's *Poetics*, 'fine art eliminates what is transient and particular and reveals the

¹⁰⁷ H. Quistorp, *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8 and pp. 20 ff.

¹⁰⁸ See n. 85 above.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Edwards, *Towards a Christian Poetics* (London: McMillan, 1984), pp. 208-10. See also Charbonnier, *op. cit.*, p. 150 f. for Claude Lévi-Strauss' account of the artistic process of exclusion.

permanent and essential features of the original¹¹⁰. Butcher's commentary is referred to by John Hospers in his work, *Meaning and Truth in the Arts*, and Hospers himself provides a valuable addition to our understanding of how works of art reveal the truth. He argues that artistic truth is not propositional truth, i.e. it is not true about someone or something. Rather, it is 'true-to' someone or something¹¹¹, for example, true to life. He suggests that characters from literature can be more true than life itself in that they reveal more about human nature than any person we have met, to which I would add, more than any person might choose to reveal¹¹². In the field of visual art, we see a similar process at work in paintings by El Greco. He uses a 'necessary distortion' of the perceptible world to reveal inner truths about his subjects¹¹³. We also see this process at work in the late self-portraits of Rembrandt, which are true-to universal aspects of human nature.

Beauty and Newness

Clearly, attaining to the fullness of divine truth is a slow process and not one that we can achieve in this life. However, works of art such as those of El Greco and Rembrandt that I have just referred to can help us to make a start on this journey. The artist can assist us on the way by a process of 'chipping away' at the extraneous aspects of what he or she sees to provide us with new insights on the nature of truth¹¹⁴. The artistic process involves

¹¹⁰ S. H. Butcher, *Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art*, 4th edition (London: Macmillan and Co., 1907), pp. 150-1.

¹¹¹ Hospers, *op. cit.*, pp. 162 ff. Note, though, that although we do not perceive artistic truth as propositional in the first instance, we often turn what we perceive from art into propositions, and it is these that we store in our memory.

¹¹² *ibid.*, p. 163.

¹¹³ *ibid.*, pp. 173-4.

¹¹⁴ It should be remembered that not all art will contain divine truth. Calvin Seerveld provides a useful set of guidelines or tests for helping us to discern whether or not what we apprehend from art is divine truth.

‘diving into the flux’ of the world and returning with a ‘new shape’, which once set down in some medium can be communicated to others¹¹⁵. This idea of newness is an important one and again provides us with another way of understanding Calvin’s use of the word ‘beauty’.

In his account of the role of the Holy Spirit in Calvinist aesthetics, C. G. Geluk argues that the beauty of God has much in common with newness¹¹⁶. God is active in the world, making all things new and by definition beautiful. This includes making those who have faith into new creations (II Cor. 5: 17). As a consequence of being renewed, these new creations themselves do or create new things, things that did not previously exist. For example, the Gospel of Mark tells us that those who believe will speak in new tongues (Mark 16: 17). Likewise, the artist, filled with God’s Spirit, will create new works of art. These works will make the world beautiful, not only by being aesthetically pleasing, if that they are, but by pointing to something of God’s truth. Further, they will be seen by others who themselves will be renewed and inspired to take part in the work of making the world beautiful and restoring it. In this way, they and the whole world take a step towards a new heaven and a new earth (Rev. 21: 1). Here again, we see the potential eschatological function of art¹¹⁷.

I discuss these at length in Chapter Three.

¹¹⁵ T. E. Hulme, *Speculations: Essays on Humanism and the Philosophy of Art*, Herbert Read (ed.) (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1924), p. 149.

¹¹⁶ Geluk, *op. cit.*, pp. 203 ff. Geluk bases his account on the work by Rudolf Bohren, *Dass Gott schön werde. Praktische Theologie als theologische Ästhetik* (Munich: Kaiser, 1975), pp. 226 ff.

¹¹⁷ Geluk, *op. cit.*, p. 205. In all these instances, the New Testament Greek word for ‘new’ is *καινός*. This word has an intrinsically eschatological meaning, in contrast to the other word for ‘new’ commonly used in the New Testament, *νέος*, which has no such meaning. See J. Behm, ‘*καινός*’ in: G. Kittel (ed.), G. W. Bromley (trans. and ed.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. III (Grand Rapids:

So, we may now summarize the artistic process, within the framework of a Calvinist epistemology and eschatology, as follows. The artist encounters God's work in the created order by contemplating the evidence of it in experience¹¹⁸. Through what Calvin refers to as the 'spectacles' of Scripture¹¹⁹ and the knowledge and certainty of the saving work of Christ that is faith, he or she will recognize that what they have experienced has its origin in God. They will then attempt to portray this underlying truth in a work of art so that they and others may recognize and share in this truth, and here we should not forget the work of the Holy Spirit. This process will, it is hoped, strengthen both the faith of the artist and that of those who see their work, and consequently take them a step nearer to union with Christ, which is the goal of all believers. An increase in faith will help to make the world more beautiful, or, in other words, help to carry out God's renewal of the world. Another way of saying this is that although beauty is not in itself salvific, as a result of salvation, we can make the world beautiful¹²⁰.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion, I argue that with the provisos mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, i.e. that we should not make representations of God, or give these or any other works of art, including in particular religious images, the honour which is due to God, visual art has a valid place within Calvin's epistemological framework. We must also remember that we can know nothing of God's essence and that it is merely his works, or

Eerdmans, 1965), pp. 447-454.

¹¹⁸ van der Kooi, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

¹¹⁹ *Institutes* I, vi, 1. See n. 1 to this paragraph for other instances of Calvin's use of this metaphor and for references to secondary literature on his use of the term.

¹²⁰ Cottin, *op. cit.*, p. 309 f.

truth, that we should try to portray in art¹²¹. Finally, we need to view both God's creation and providence and the works of art which attempt to portray them in the light of Christ as revealed in Scripture, a process which underpins all of Calvin's epistemology.

In the next chapter, we continue to reflect on how we may know of God's actions in the world within Calvin's theological framework. Here, our attention will be focussed above all on one of Calvin's 'mirrors', Scripture, and more specifically the Book of Psalms.

What I will argue is that the metrical psalms that Calvin allowed for in the Geneva Psalter have much in common not only epistemologically, but also ontologically, with the types of artworks that we are advocating in this thesis, i.e. histories and landscapes.

¹²¹ I recognize that the firm distinction that Calvin attempts to draw between God's works and his essence is not necessarily a robust account of the reality of God's nature and of how he interacts with the created order. I suggest that he is so keen to make this distinction in order to preserve God's otherness and to counter what he saw as the contemporary tendency to over-emphasize God's immanence. For him, this tendency led to attempts to limit God's freedom and it was this above all else that Calvin was intent on preserving.

Chapter Three: Calvin, music and visual art: Ontological and epistemological similarities between Calvin's metrical psalmody and history and landscape paintings

Introduction

In the last chapter, we looked at how we might use certain aspects of John Calvin's thought, particularly his epistemology and his eschatology, in order to argue for the introduction of appropriate works of visual art into churches in the Reformed tradition. The fact that we are doing this reflects to some extent the opposition that there has often been towards the use of visual art in these churches. Interestingly, this contrasts sharply with the much more positive attitude exhibited in the Reformed tradition towards two other cultural artefacts, music and architecture.

In this chapter and the next we will look at each of these in turn to see what arguments they may afford us in favour of the use of visual art in churches in the Reformed tradition. In this chapter, though, we will concentrate our attention on music both as it was defined by Calvin and also as practised in churches influenced by his thought such as the Dutch Reformed Church and the English United Reformed Church. Our intention will be to examine whether we can find not only epistemological arguments, but also ontological ones with which to support the use of those works of visual art that we are advocating in this thesis, namely histories and landscapes.

Calvin's attitude to music: An Introduction

We begin our study in the year 1562, when the first complete edition of what is without doubt one of the most important works in the history of Reformed worship, the Geneva Psalter, was published simultaneously in several cities including Geneva, Paris and Lyons.

This edition differed from its predecessors in that for the first time it comprised versifications of all 150 Psalms, together with 125 different tunes¹. Two-thirds of these versifications, or metrical psalms, were produced by Theodore Beza², the rest by the celebrated French poet Clément Marot³. Some of the melodies were written by Loys Bourgeois, some by Pierre Davantès and others by Guillaume Franc⁴. But, despite the absence of his name from these lists, there is no doubt that the process of developing and publishing the Geneva Psalter owes a great deal to the work of John Calvin⁵.

This process began in 1539, when *Aulcuns pseaulmes et cantiques mys en chant* ('Some psalms and canticles set to music') was published under Calvin's guidance during his time in Strasbourg. It included twelve metrical psalms by Marot and six which have been ascribed to Calvin himself⁶. In 1542, after his return to Geneva, Calvin oversaw the production of the first Geneva Psalter, called *La Forme des Prières et Chantz Ecclésiastiques* ('The Order of Prayers and Ecclesiastical Songs'), which incorporated thirty-five metrical psalms and an order of service⁷. A year later, in 1543, the second

¹ Albert Dunning, 'Calvin, Jean' in: *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 2nd ed., Stanley Sadie (ed.) (London: MacMillan, 2001) (henceforth *Grove*), Volume 4, *Borowski to Canobbio*, pp. 844-7, at p. 845.

² Beza arrived in Geneva in May, 1549 and is generally regarded as the successor to Calvin in Geneva. See: Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, p. 90.

³ In exact numbers, Beza created 101 and Marot 49 of the metrical psalms. See: Robert Weeda, *Le Psautier de Calvin* (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2002), p. 29.

⁴ Weeda, *op. cit.*, p. 29 and Dunning, *op. cit.*, p. 845. Note that both Weeda and Dunning ascribe certain tunes to Bourgeois. Weeda seems certain that Davantès was one of the composers, whereas Dunning is more cautious. He says that one composer was a certain 'Maître Pierre', although he does conclude that it is most likely that this was Davantès. Dunning, however, makes no mention of Franc, whilst Weeda suggests about forty tunes can be ascribed to him.

⁵ Weeda, *op. cit.*, p. 20.

⁶ Richard R. Terry, *Calvin's First Psalter [1539]* (London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1932), p. v.

⁷ Andreas Marti and Bert Polman, 'Reformed and Presbyterian church music' in: *Grove*, Volume 21, *Recitative to Russian Federation*, pp. 78-87, at p. 79.

edition of the Geneva Psalter, *Cinquante Pseaumes* ('Fifty Psalms'), was published, comprising forty-nine metrical psalms and the *Nunc Dimittis*⁸. This edition differed from its predecessors in that all the metrical psalm texts were by Marot. However, those psalms which had already appeared in the previous Psalters now included significant revisions which to a large extent reflected Calvin's own interpretation of the individual psalms⁹. Calvin also wrote a preface to this edition which both incorporated and added to the preface he wrote for the 1542 Psalter. This revised preface represents Calvin's most detailed discussion on psalmody and was reproduced without amendments in nearly all editions of the Geneva Psalter for more than a century¹⁰.

One of the features of psalmody that Calvin affirms in this preface is its ability to educate¹¹. Indeed, in the sixteenth century metrical psalms were generally seen as intrinsic to the humanist educational programme, with which Calvin was closely associated¹², and they were part of a response to the humanist belief that man could fashion his own

⁸ *ibid.*. See also Weeda, *op. cit.*, p. 9. Weeda makes no mention of the Ten Commandments being in the 1543 Psalter, although Pierre Pidoux asserts that it did include them. See: Théodore de Bèze (Beza), *Psaumes mis en Vers Français (1551-1562), Accompagnés de la Version en Prose de Lois Budé*, Pierre Pidoux (ed.) (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1984), p. 6. It is not completely clear from what Pidoux writes whether or not this was a versification, or indeed whether it was set to music, but on balance, this does seem likely. But, it seems, definitive statements regarding the contents of the 1543 Psalter cannot be made with absolute certainty as an original copy of it has not been preserved. See: Robin Leaver, 'Goostly psalmes and spirituall songes': *English and Dutch Metrical Psalms from Coverdale to Utenhove, 1535-1566* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), p. 48.

⁹ Michel Jeanneret, *Poésie et Tradition Biblique au XVIe Siècle* (Paris: Librairie José Corti, 1969), pp. 78-81.

¹⁰ Charles Garside, 'The Origins of Calvin's Theory of Music 1536-43', in: *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 69 (1979), pp. 1-36, at p. 16. For the full text of Calvin's preface, see: John Calvin, 'The Form of Prayers and Songs of the church, 1542 Letter to the Reader', Ford Lewis Battles (trans.), in: *Calvin Theological Journal*, 15:2 (1980), pp. 160-165. See also Weeda, *op. cit.*, p. 12, n. 11.

¹¹ John Calvin, 'The Form of Prayers and Songs of the church, 1542 Letter to the Reader', *op. cit.*, p. 163.

¹² Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, pp. 29 ff., and François Wendel (1976), *op. cit.*.

character¹³. He could do this by using David as a spiritual model. Indeed, for Calvin the Psalms were a mirror in which the subject could examine him or herself in relation to David, and then model themselves on him¹⁴. In 1557, Calvin wrote in a letter to the readers in his commentary on the Psalms that they are an ‘Anatomy of all parts of the soul, for not an affection will a man find in himself, an image of which is not reflected in this glass’¹⁵. The ability of the metrical psalms to educate was facilitated by the fact that they were written in the vernacular as opposed to Latin¹⁶. This allowed the faithful to both remember and understand what they sang, which in turn allowed them to sing from the heart, something which, as Calvin noted, St. Paul exhorts us to do in his epistles to the Ephesians (5: 19) and to the Colossians (3: 16)¹⁷.

It is interesting to note, though, that Calvin did not always have such a high regard for music and it seems that his attitude towards it changed most markedly during his time in Strasbourg between 1538 and 1541, particularly as a result of the contact he had there with his fellow Reformer, Martin Bucer¹⁸. But, not only did Calvin’s attitude to music

¹³ Rivkah Zim, *English Metrical Psalms: Poetry as Praise and Prayer, 1535-1601* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), p. 33.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, p. 30. This idea was underpinned by the fact that, traditionally, David was seen as a typological forerunner of Christ, a fact echoed by the translators of the Geneva Bible. (See: ‘The Argument’ (introduction) for ‘The Psalmes of David’ in: Lloyd E. Berry (intro.), *The Geneva Bible: A facsimile of the 1560 edition* (London: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1969), p. 235). Further, as Robert Isherwood notes, the Church Fathers made David a substitute for Orpheus as a musical figure who could help man lift himself. See: Robert Isherwood, *Music in the Service of the King: France in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Cornell University Press, 1973), p. 12. See also Zim, p. 34.

¹⁵ J. R. Watson, *The English Hymn: A Critical and Historical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 44. See also: Zim, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁶ John Calvin, ‘The Form of Prayers and Songs of the church, 1542 Letter to the Reader’, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p. 164.

¹⁸ This is the thrust of Charles Garside’s argument in his article, ‘The Origins of Calvin’s Theory of Music 1536-43’, *op. cit.*. J. T. Vanderwilt suggests though that ‘Garside may have easily exaggerated Calvin’s shift in attitude toward music from 1536 to 1547’. There may be some truth in this, and as

change during this time. It also seems that his approach to visual art developed during his time in exile, so it may be worth our while considering the extent to which his attitude towards each art form coincided after his return to Geneva in 1541.

In the first instance, Calvin wrote that both music, and painting and sculpture are gifts from God, to be used for his glorification¹⁹. In addition, he believed that the Holy Spirit plays a vital role in man's engagement with each of these art forms²⁰.

However, in contrast to his understanding of music, Calvin ascribed little epistemological value to visual art. Although he did see in history paintings 'some use in teaching and admonition', he wrote that paintings of most other subjects provide nothing other than pleasure²¹. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, whereas Calvin allowed for certain music in church services, he argued against the use of any visual art in church buildings²².

But, although nearly five hundred years have elapsed since Calvin wrote on these matters, the different treatment of music and visual art that we find in his writings still persists to a large extent in the Reformed tradition today, and in this chapter I want to ask whether this

Garside himself admits, Calvin may already have seen the value of singing during his time in Basel, before the publication of the first edition of the *Institutes*. But, what does seem beyond doubt, though, is that Calvin did shift his position in respect to singing over time, a fact reflected both in his writing on the subject and the contents of the various Psalters whose compilation he oversaw. See: J. T. Vanderwilt, 'John Calvin's Theology of Liturgical Song' in: *Christian Scholar's Review* 1995, 25 (1), pp. 63-82, at p. 68.

¹⁹ John Calvin, 'The Form of Prayers and Songs of the church, 1542 Letter to the Reader', *op. cit.*, p. 163, and *Institutes* I, xi, 12.

²⁰ For Calvin's assertion that the Holy Spirit is involved in the process of creating works of visual art, see: *Institutes* II, ii, 16. In regard to music, Calvin wrote that David was inspired to write the Psalms by the Holy Spirit and also that it is the Holy Spirit that leads us to sing God's praises. See: John Calvin, 'The Form of Prayers and Songs of the church, 1542 Letter to the Reader', *op. cit.*, p. 163.

²¹ *Institutes* I, xi, 12. Further study might usefully be carried out to consider what exactly Calvin meant by the word 'pleasure' (Latin: *oblectatio*).

²² *Institutes* I, xi, 13.

distinction is still tenable²³. I will suggest that if we look at the nature of music used in Reformed worship today, and also at changes in the understanding of visual art in the period from Calvin's time to our own²⁴, we will see that certain types of visual art have much in common with Calvin's understanding of music, perhaps more so than does contemporary worship music. The similarities I will discuss are of two types, those which relate to ontology and those which relate to epistemology. By the former, I mean similarities in the kind of existence possessed by these works of art²⁵, and by the latter I mean similarities in the way that we know the works of art, including their subject matter. But, we admit, there are also differences between visual art and music, particularly in respect to their ontology²⁶, and it is with four of these differences that I begin before moving on to consider how we might hold these two art forms together.

Differences between music and visual art

The first difference between music and visual art that I want to discuss is that whereas works of visual art can be touched and held, music, particularly when it is performed, cannot be²⁷. Another way of describing this difference is to say that whilst works of visual

²³ See Chapter Five for some rare cases of paintings being displayed in Reformed churches.

²⁴ Belting, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-16. See also: Green, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-97.

²⁵ Nicholas Wolterstorff, 'Ontology of Artworks' in: David Cooper (ed.), *A Companion to Aesthetics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 310-314, at p. 310.

²⁶ Stephen Davies et al. provide another definition of ontology when they suggest that it is the form, manner or matter of a thing. I will argue that although music and visual art may differ in form and matter, it is in manner where the similarities are most apparent. See: Stephen Davies et al., 'Philosophy of music', in: *Grove, Volume 19, Paliashvili to Pohle*, pp. 601-631, at p. 621.

²⁷ Some might consider that music can be held to the extent that psalters or hymn-books are held when worshippers sing. There is a sense in which this view of music reminds us that for some it consists both of what is to be performed (a *performable*) and individual performances. This, they argue, distinguishes it ontologically from visual art. I discuss this in more detail below, but suffice to say here that in common experience the hymn-book may be seen as a means to an end, i.e. the singing of its contents, rather than an end in itself, which may be how works of visual art are viewed.

art may be considered as material objects, music seems to be somehow more ethereal. Such a difference seems to have lain at the heart of the different treatment of these two art forms in the Reformed tradition. For Calvin, God is spirit, and so cannot be worshipped with material objects²⁸. Song, when it is performed, may be thought of as other than material, so this may have been one reason why Calvin allowed for it in worship. However, whether one can call song spirit or even singing spiritual worship is of course another matter, for as modern science tells us, we could not hear singing were it not for the collision of material molecules in the medium, in this case air, through which it travels. We might reasonably ask what exactly it means to say that God is spirit. Perhaps, an important aspect of this is that God is invisible²⁹. If we are then asked to worship God by a means that is invisible, then maybe it is appropriate to use song and not visual art, although we should remember here that I am not advocating the use of visual art to worship God, but rather to remind ourselves of his actions in the world³⁰. But I wonder if an invisible/visible dichotomy as opposed to a material/spiritual one is sufficient to distinguish between music and visual art. For, as we shall see in more detail below, the splendour of many organs in Reformed churches, particularly in the Netherlands³¹, and the presence of worship bands with a charismatic lead-worshipper and expensive modern musical instruments in Reformed churches, make the music that we use in worship today much more of a visible phenomenon than that which Calvin himself affirmed in the

²⁸ Eire, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

²⁹ This idea seems to inform Calvin's discussion of religious images in *Institutes* I, xi, 12.

³⁰ I mention this at several points in the first two chapters.

³¹ See Chapter Five.

sixteenth century.

Another difference between music and visual art that I want to consider is the manner in which each relates to both time and space. Music is able to fill a large space, the size of which depends on the media through which it must travel and the intensity with which it is produced, although we are not always mindful of this fact as the sound itself is not visible to us. In the physical world, each performance of music lasts only as long as it is produced, although it may well continue to exist in the memory of those who perform it and hear it. By contrast, works of visual art such as paintings generally occupy a relatively small, fixed space, although we might perceive that certain works can dominate a particular view³². Again, visual works of art usually occupy this space for a considerable period of time to the extent that their position may be considered permanent. This fixity may lead people to desire, or even to want to possess works of visual art. One way of removing this risk and thus making works of visual art more acceptable to those in the Reformed tradition is to move them on a regular basis. We have a model for this in the use of the Methodist Church Collection of Modern Christian Art³³.

A third difference between visual art and music, and by the latter I again refer here specifically to singing, is that whereas paintings and other works of visual art rarely contain words, in songs these are one of the principal constituents. As one might expect from an advocate of the humanist educational programme, Calvin believed that words were an important vehicle for the truth. This was particularly so in the case of the metrical

³² Think for example of how a painting such as *The Mona Lisa*, although comparatively small, would dominate any view in which it was included.

³³ See Chapter Four.

psalms, based as they were on the Word of God. By contrast, he argued that works of art, most of which contain no words³⁴, had little or no epistemological value at all³⁵ and could not therefore communicate the truth. However, as I will discuss in more detail below, we should remember that the metrical psalms in the Geneva Psalter are not Biblical texts as such, but rather rhymed versifications based on Biblical texts. The Psalms of David provide a starting point for these versifications, but the final product is the result of the poet's imaginative engagement with the texts we find in Scripture. If we consider Scripture as the first book of God's revelation, then we begin to see parallels between the metrical psalms and those types of visual art that I am arguing for in this thesis. For example, history paintings of Biblical subjects such as those of Rembrandt that I discuss in Chapter Six may also be seen as the product of the artist's imaginative engagement with the first book of God's revelation. Likewise, landscape paintings such as those of Jacob van Ruisdael that I discuss in Chapter Seven may be seen as the result of the artist's imaginative engagement with the second book of God's revelation, his creation. So, despite clear formal differences we begin to see that there are in fact similarities between metrical psalmody and certain types of visual art.

A fourth difference between music and visual art would seem to be that whereas the former, particularly when understood as monodic psalmody or indeed hymnody, is

³⁴ An interesting example of the use of words in works of visual art is that of the wood-cuts produced by Lucas Cranach the Elder (1472-1553), which are often considered to be part of the Lutheran programme of propaganda against Roman Catholicism.

³⁵ See Chapter One, n. 2, where I quote a letter from Calvin to an unknown student in the year 1540, in which the Reformer likens those who use scholarship to 'beguile the tedium of idleness' to those who spend their lives looking at paintings.

experienced as a communal activity, the latter is often not.

A fine account of the communal dimensions to psalmody is given by J. R. Watson in his work, *The English Hymn*. Although, as the title suggests, Watson mainly concerns himself with the history and literary value of English hymns, he devotes one chapter, Chapter Three, to psalmody and notes that metrical psalmody has much more in common with hymnody than some commentators seem to suggest³⁶.

Watson notes that in hymnody, and, by analogy, psalmody, the singer becomes part of a group process. He suggests that this is to some extent due to the words themselves and that 'the vocalized "I" or "we" of the [psalm] becom[es] part of the involvement with public worship'³⁷. When singing the psalms of David, the 'I' of David becomes the 'I' of each singer. We can take this one step further and recognize that the 'I' becomes an expression of personal experience which is shared with those who also proclaim this 'I'. Watson gives Psalm 111 as a good example of this³⁸. The metrical psalm in the Geneva Psalter, created by Theodore Beza, runs,

Du Seigneur Dieu en tous endroits,

En l'assemblée des plus droits,

De chanter à Dieu coustumiere,

La gloire je confesseray,

Et sa louange anonceray

³⁶ Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

³⁷ *ibid.*, p. 22.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p. 44.

*D'une affection toute entiere*³⁹.

The communal dimension to psalmody, and the sense of shared experience in it, is perhaps even more overt when the subject is 'we'. This can be seen in the opening lines of the metrical psalm 90, again produced by Beza,

Tu as esté, Seigneur, nostre retraite

*Et seur recours, de lignée en lignée ...*⁴⁰

As Watson notes, the character of metrical psalms is both expressive and congregational⁴¹. They provide us with the means to express 'spiritual problems, hopes, fears, and individual emotions'⁴². In doing so, they allow us to recognize that we do not experience these things alone, but rather that we have them in common with our fellow singers. Further, I suggest that they also provide the means by which we begin a conversation about shared experience that starts with communal singing, addressing God, but can move onto a discussion, outside the confines of worship, where we can share our experience with fellow Christians on the same journey.

By contrast, visual art in the first instance seems to be a solitary activity, in which the artist records his or her experience of the world. However, this is not the whole story. Visual art, in common with other forms of art, does not express the 'truth about', but the 'truth to'⁴³. It communicates with us not by being an expression of an artist's unique,

³⁹ Beza, *op. cit.*, p. 206. NRSV: 'Praise the Lord! I will give thanks to the Lord with my whole heart, in the company of the upright, in the congregation'.

⁴⁰ Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 44 and Beza, *op. cit.*, p. 166. NRSV: 'Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations'.

⁴¹ Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 44.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 53.

⁴³ See Chapter Two.

idiosyncratic vision, a whimsical flight of fancy if you will, but rather because we recognize in it what is true to life, or true to experience⁴⁴. By this I mean that although the work of art begins with the artist's own personal experience, what it expresses about experience is true in that it stands the test of or is verified in common experience⁴⁵.

When an artist creates a work of art, he or she can express their fears, joys, hopes or other emotions on the canvas, or in a given material. Those who see the work can recognize these emotions and realize that they are not alone in what they experience, but rather that there is someone else who has emotions similar to their own. But, this is not merely a uni-directional process. If one looks at a work of art with others, then one can discuss the emotions that it evokes and recognize that such emotions are experienced across the community.

And, of course, we should remember that although some works of art may largely be the result of one person's efforts, others such as many of those ascribed to Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), have been created by a team of artists. And here we see that producing works of visual art can be a deeply communal activity. In the process of creating a work together, we can both experience and express our own emotions, which we can share with others, either verbally, or through the work itself, and identify and sympathize with the emotions of others by the same process.

Clearly, though, whereas psalmody fits comfortably into the Reformed liturgy, it is less

⁴⁴ Hospers, *op. cit.*, pp. 202 ff.

⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 194.

easy for the creation or contemplation of visual art to do so⁴⁶. But, if we create a separate time and space for ourselves, then visual art can provide us with a communal experience with benefits similar to those of the communal experience of psalmody and hymnody.

This then provides us with an account of some of the differences between music and visual art. But, interestingly, what we have seen is that even within such differences, we find opportunities to draw parallels between these two art forms. So, let us build on these and consider other ways in which we might hold together music on the one hand and painting and sculpture on the other. One way I suggest is to look at the field of aesthetics to see whether those active in this field consider it possible to give a general account which holds the ontologies of these art forms together .

Unitive theories of the ontology of artworks

Some argue that it is not possible and see music and certain forms of visual art including painting as ontologically distinct. They contend that music consists both of something to be performed, a *performable*, and also individual performances of musical works. So, for example, they will say that Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* consists both of the music that is to be performed, which may be preserved in a score, and also the many individual performances of the symphony⁴⁷. Another way of understanding their view is to use terms introduced by the American philosopher, C. S. Peirce, and consider the *performable* as a 'type' and the individual performances as 'tokens'. They argue that paintings and for that

⁴⁶ This said, I have seen examples of the creation of visual art in 'post-evangelical' church gatherings. However, this leads us beyond the scope of the current work, which is looking specifically at worship within the Reformed tradition.

⁴⁷ Wolterstorff (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 310-311.

matter non-cast sculptures do not work in this way and are thus ontologically distinct from music⁴⁸.

Others, though, disagree and argue that music and works of visual art are of the same ontological order. One of these is Gregory Currie, and it is interesting to note that he uses as a starting point for his argument the type/token distinction advocated by Peirce⁴⁹.

In fact, Currie asserts that all forms of art, whether they be literature, instrumental music, vocal music, painting, sculpture or architecture are ontologically of the same order. Taking his lead from Peirce, he argues that all works of art, such as Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, or Picasso's *Guernica*, consist of an action type, or a disembodied original, of which there is one or more action tokens, or embodied instances⁵⁰. He addresses what he considers to be the main arguments against his thesis and then concludes that what distinguishes one particular action type from another is firstly the individual structure of the work and secondly the heuristic path of the work, i.e. the process by which its structure comes into being⁵¹. This is interesting as his model rejects the notion that the identity of the author is constitutive of a work's ontology. So, for example, for him what is constitutive of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* is the structure of the piece and the means by which Beethoven came to write it, but not Beethoven's authorship itself. From this perspective, another composer, completely unaware of Beethoven's work, could in theory have produced a work with the same structure and the same heuristic path. Both,

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 311.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 313.

⁵⁰ Gregory Currie, *The Ontology of Art* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 3-8.

⁵¹ *ibid.*, pp. 66-71.

according to Currie, would be instances, or action tokens, of an original, disembodied, *Ninth Symphony*. Any subsequent performance of this work would also be an action token of the original, as it would be an instance of the original combination of structure and heuristic path. This is also the case, Currie argues, with pictures and sculptures. He recognizes that initially this might be difficult for us to accept, so he deals with two concerns that might prevent us from acknowledging it. The first has to do with technology⁵². Currie suggests that it is only because of the technological limitations of the processes involved in reproducing works of visual art that we place more value on seeing an original painting, such as van Gogh's *Sunflowers*⁵³, than we do on seeing a composer's or author's original manuscript. He argues that if we could reproduce the exact qualities of the original painting, such as colour and texture, we would be more likely to consider both van Gogh's work and copies of it as embodied instances of a disembodied original. This, he tells us, is how we view manuscripts and facsimiles of them, as the reproduction of these manuscripts is not limited to the same extent by technology. I must admit, though, that I am not entirely convinced by this argument, and think that in some cases, however good a copy of the original a facsimile is, we still do want to see the original. I recognize, though, that this depends to an extent on who the author of the original was. For example, many people would want to see an original manuscript of Shakespeare's, but may not have the same desire to see a manuscript of a lesser known author.

The second concern that Currie deals with in collapsing the distinction between kinds of

⁵² *ibid.*, p. 87.

⁵³ Van Gogh did, in fact, paint pictures on this theme many times. So, let us, for the sake of argument, consider his work *Sunflowers* (1889), which currently hangs in the Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam.

art, especially between music and literature as one kind and painting and sculpture as another, is particularly associated with the American philosopher, Nicholas Wolterstorff⁵⁴. According to Currie, Wolterstorff argues that works of music, and indeed literature, are ontologically distinct from paintings or sculptures, because whereas for the former there exists an abstract entity, a 'norm kind'⁵⁵, by which the correctness or otherwise of an embodied work can be judged, for paintings or sculptures this does not appear to be the case. For them, the prototype or template is not a disembodied original, but rather an embodied work such as the canvas on which van Gogh painted his *Sunflowers* or the block of marble from which Michelangelo sculpted his *Pietà*⁵⁶. Currie argues that the reason that music and literature appear to have a disembodied original whilst painting and sculpture do not is that whereas for music and literature we can apply standards independent of the work of art in order to decide whether it is correct or not, for painting and sculpture we have to refer to an embodied work, such as van Gogh's original canvas. For example, if we see a misspelling in a copy of the words for Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, or see that one bar contains five beats (admittedly unlikely), then we can judge it to be incorrect. These criteria exist independently from any embodied instance of the work. By contrast, we can only judge the correctness of a copy of an original painting or sculpture by reference to the embodied original. It may be that the head is too large or a

⁵⁴ Currie, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-91.

⁵⁵ Wolterstorff sets out this theory in: *Works and Worlds of Art* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). See also: Wolterstorff (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 314.

⁵⁶ I recognize that for each of these, there is more than one embodied example. For van Gogh's *Sunflowers*, see n. 53, and let us say for the sake of argument that when we speak of Michelangelo's *Pietà*, we are referring to the work in St. Peter's, Rome.

leg too long in the original, but we can only judge the correctness of a copy by reference to this embodied original and not to any external standards of what we might expect a head or leg to look like. For Currie, though, this does not negate the fact that for all types of art there exist disembodied action types of which subsequent instances are actions tokens. It merely explains why we might think, erroneously in his view, that this is not the case.

Interestingly, Wolterstorff in turn takes the chance to look at Currie's theory in a general survey on the ontology of artworks. He argues that one problem with Currie's attempts to achieve a uniform theory of the ontology of artworks is that for example in relation to music the heuristic path that he describes helps to define the process of composing, rather than the finished piece of music itself. Wolterstorff refers to this process as a *composing* and somewhat jestfully argues that since 'composings are not the sorts of things that can be heard, it follows that works of music cannot be heard'⁵⁷. I would add that there is another problem with Currie's theory, and it is similar to the concern that Wolterstorff has with another group of unitive theories, the *mentalistic* theories, of which that proposed by R. G. Collingwood in *The Principles of Art* is an important example⁵⁸. The problem that Wolterstorff identifies with these theories is that it seems that a work does not exist if no-one has it in mind. Likewise, I wonder with Currie's theory where the structure of a given work exists before it comes into the mind of a composer or artist. In theory, if we consider that the universe is very large and also that there may be other universes beyond

⁵⁷ Wolterstorff (1995), *op. cit.*, p. 313.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 312.

our own, then it could be argued that it would necessarily exist at all times. But our experience is different. Our natural position would be to ask whether the structure of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony* really existed before Beethoven penned it. I am not so sure it did.

So, we see from this discussion that the unitive theories of Currie and others such as Collingwood do have their shortcomings and that they are thus unable to provide us with a sufficiently firm basis on which to hold music and visual art together. But, perhaps our attempts to do this would be better served in this context by another approach, namely to examine in detail the nature of the music advocated by Calvin, and then to look for ontological and indeed epistemological similarities between this and the visual works of art that we are advocating in this thesis, namely histories and landscapes. And it is this approach that we now adopt. But on the way we will also chart the developments in Reformed worship that take us away from the monodic metrical psalmody that Calvin affirmed, and in doing so will be forced to reflect on the fact that some of the music used in Reformed worship today has arguably less in common with Calvin's understanding of music than do history and landscape paintings.

The nature of the music that Calvin advocated

But, let us begin by examining in detail what Calvin tells us he means by the term music, and here we should remember that he is talking within the context of what is appropriate for worship, in his Preface to the 1543 Geneva Psalter. He tells us that it consists of two parts: first the text, or as he phrases it, 'the letter or subject and matter' and secondly the

melody⁵⁹. Let us look at each of these in turn.

Regarding text, Calvin writes that there are no better songs for praising God than the Psalms of David⁶⁰. As we have already learnt, the texts used in the Geneva Psalter were not mere literal translations of the Hebrew but rather rhymed versifications of the Psalms. We will look in more detail below at what this tells us about the relationship between the Psalms in the Old Testament and the metrical psalms in the Psalter, particularly those of Clément Marot. But, suffice to say here that the texts that we find in the Psalter were based on the Psalms of David.

It is difficult to underestimate the educative value attached to metrical psalms in the sixteenth century. As we mentioned above, they were seen as an intrinsic part of an individual's personal development. It was widely believed that whereas the other books in the Bible tell us what God says to us, the Psalms teach us what we can say to God and how we can say it⁶¹. In other words, the Psalms and in particular the metrical psalms provided a valuable vehicle for self-expression to those who lived in the sixteenth century, and thus reflected an important shift in the ontology of vocal music from that which had been ascribed to in previous times. And by taking a brief look at this shift, as we now do, we will get a better idea of the nature of the music that Calvin and his fellow humanists advocated.

Changes in the ontology of vocal music from antiquity to the sixteenth century

Since antiquity and during the Middle Ages, a common understanding of all music had

⁵⁹ John Calvin, 'The Form of Prayers and Songs of the church, 1542 Letter to the Reader', *op. cit.*, p. 164.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

⁶¹ Zim, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

been that it had divine origins. This tradition originated with Pythagoras and found its way into Western thought via Plato's *Republic* (Book X) and the concept of *musica mundana*, developed by Boethius (c. 480-c. 524)⁶². It was believed that music coincided with and gave expression to cosmic order and harmony and in this regard was seen as a manifestation of mathematical proportion. Understood thus, it sat well with other mathematical disciplines, such as geometry, arithmetic and astronomy, and with these it formed the *quadrivium*, or four-fold means by which a student of these subjects could move closer to the essence of God⁶³. However, since antiquity music or *musica* had covered a broad range of meaning and incorporated the wide variety of disciplines associated with the Greek muses. These included not only the instrumental music and song that we usually associate with the term today, but also an art form closely related to song, poetry, and even dance. And indeed, this broader understanding of music was still current well into the Middle Ages⁶⁴. But, this very broadness also created some tension and it seems that those who wrote on the subject of music in the medieval period expended much effort in trying to hold together seemingly disparate accounts of its ontology. They had to reconcile the almost ethereal science of mathematical proportion, in which music was seen as a reflection of cosmic harmony, with the more earth-bound

⁶² Jeremy Begbie, 'Music, Word, and Theology Today: Learning from John Calvin', in: Lyn Holness and Ralf K. Wüstenberg (eds.), *Theology in Dialogue: The Impact of the Arts, Humanities and Science on Contemporary Religious Thought* (Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2002), pp. 3-27, at pp. 21-22, and Calvin Bower, 'Boethius' in: *Grove, Volume 3, Baxter to Borosini*, pp. 784-6.

⁶³ This understanding of the quadrivium and the place of music within it was developed by Boethius, who drew on the work of Augustine of Hippo. A good summary of Boethius' account of this is given in: Jeremy Begbie (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 22, n. 54. See also Bower, *op. cit.*

⁶⁴ John Stevens, *Words and Music in the Middle Ages, Song, Narrative, Dance and Drama, 1050-1350* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), pp. 381-2.

practices of the composition and performance of music, especially in the form of song⁶⁵. We see this tension perhaps most clearly in Boethius' distinction between the music theorist (*musicus*) and the poet. Whereas he considered that the former applied divinely inspired knowledge to his art, he believed that the latter did not compose songs with such knowledge but rather by instinct⁶⁶.

Some medieval commentators such as Guido d'Arezzo (born c. 995) and, later, Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) succeeded in part in holding together these accounts of music by suggesting that both bespoke harmony⁶⁷. However, the tension persisted and as time passed, vocal music, particularly the type of vocal music whose text was poetry, was considered to have more and more in common with the arts of rhetoric and grammar. Indeed, if we look at one of Marot's metrical psalms, we can clearly see the use of a rhetorical device, which is one of many that we find in his work. In Psalm 13, David asks the question, 'How long...?' four times in the first two verses⁶⁸. Marot takes this up, using the French 'Jusques à quand', but places this phrase in his versification in such a way that it reflects the ever-increasing desperation of David as he seeks to escape from his current plight. The first ten lines of Marot's metrical psalm run,

Jusques à quant *as estably*

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p. 374.

⁶⁶ Bower, *op. cit.*, p. 785. Note also that Boethius made a similar distinction between the *musicus* and the singer (*cantor*). See Bower, p. 785, and Stevens, *op. cit.*, p. 376.

⁶⁷ Stevens, *op. cit.*, p. 385.

⁶⁸ In the Massoretic text, the phrase appears four times in verses two and three, although as I discuss below the extent to which Marot would have been familiar with this text is open to question. See: *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, K. Elliger and W. Rudolph (eds.), 5th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelstiftung, 1967/77), p. 1095. In addition, we should note that the extent to which the phrase is used in Bible translations varies. However, the point I am making here is that it is the positioning of the phrase in his metrical psalm that allows Marot to use it as a rhetorical device.

(Seigneur) de me mettre en oubly?
Est ce à jamais? Par combien d'aage
Destourneras tu ton visaige
De moy, las, d'angoisse remply?
Jusques à quand sera mon cueur
Veillant, conseillant, praticqueur
Et plain de soucy ordinaire
Jusques à quand mon adversaire
*Sera il dessus moy vaincueur?*⁶⁹

This is important, for, together with logic, grammar and rhetoric resided not in the quadrivium of the *septem artes liberales*, but the *trivium*⁷⁰, and whereas the disciplines of the quadrivium were seen as a means by which one could move closer to the essence of God, those in the trivium were seen primarily as a means of human education and development. It is also important because despite the tension mentioned above, during the Middle Ages, vocal music, like other music, was considered to have a close association with the music of the spheres⁷¹, or Boethius' *musica mundana*, and so with heaven. Now, it was considered by many to be ontologically separate from this and to be more a product of human design than one of divine origin.

This is certainly how Calvin understood vocal music, and it is clear that he was not alone

⁶⁹ Catherine Reuben, *La Traduction des Psaumes de David par Clément Marot: Aspects poétiques et théologiques* (Paris: Editions Champion, 2000), p. 139.

⁷⁰ Daniel Chua, *Absolute Music and the Construction of Meaning* (Cambridge: CUP, 1999), p. 79. See also: Stevens, *op. cit.*, p. 377.

⁷¹ James Haar, 'Music of the spheres', in: *Grove, Volume 17, Monnet to Nirvana*, pp. 487-8.

in this regard. Others who took a similar position included members of the so-called 'Florentine Camerata' of Giovanni Bardi, Vincenzo Galilei and others, who, incidentally, played a role in the development of opera⁷². They believed that the function of music was 'to channel human verbiage from the mind to the heart to align concept with passion'⁷³. The result was, according to Daniel Chua,

*a monodic style of singing ... controlled by an ascetic minimalism, where, at least in theory, music is pared down in range and cleared of all contrapuntal clutter to concentrate its ethical affect as sung speech*⁷⁴.

This, of course, has resonances with the type of psalmody that Calvin advocated. The members of the Camerata valued text more highly than musical sound, and the same can be said of Calvin, who seemed to view melody merely as a vehicle with which to funnel text into the memory. Clearly, for him, the means by which man could be improved was by imbibing and reflecting upon the words of the Psalms. But, I wonder if this meant that the melody had no independent voice of its own. Or, to put it another way, were Calvin and his associates able to fit the melody around the text in such a way that it could not be seen to carry any meaning separate from that of the text on its own? This is an important question for if the melody did carry a meaning of its own, then we would have to conclude that Calvin failed in his attempt to use music purely as a vehicle with which to transmit meaning via the text of the Psalms. Let us try to answer it by considering first of all the

⁷² Chua, *op. cit.*, pp. 31-35. As another example of the change in the understanding of music at this time, Chua also notes that in 1586 in a speech to the *Accademia degli Alterati*, a Camerata in Florence, Giulio del Bene proposed that music should be transferred from the quadrivium to the trivium (Chua, pp. 34-5).

⁷³ Chua, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p. 33.

melodies of the Geneva Psalter in general terms, and then by looking at the relationship between text and melody in two specific metrical psalms for the Psalter.

The melodies of the metrical psalms in the Geneva Psalter

We begin by noting that one of the features of the melodies of the Geneva Psalter is that like those used by the Florentine Camerata, their range is pared down, never going beyond one octave. This of course made it easier for untrained singers to sing them⁷⁵, whilst also conforming to Calvin's call for moderation⁷⁶. They also had other features in common. For example, they all used the common time signature. All, with a few exceptions noted by Walter Blankenburg, consisted of two types of note, short and long, corresponding to short and long syllables in speech, and there was only one note per syllable, i.e. the music contained no melismata⁷⁷. Finally, each Geneva melody conformed to one of two models of rhythmic structure, derived from Strasbourg. One consisted of a longer note at the beginning and end of each melodic line, e.g.:

L(ong), S(hort), S, S, S, S, S, L

The other also included one or more long notes in the middle of the melodic line, e.g.

L, S, S, L, L, S, S, L or L, S, S, L, S, S, L, L⁷⁸.

Although it is likely that this paring down was part of Calvin's attempt to make the

⁷⁵ Lewis Lockwood, 'Music and Religion in the High Renaissance and the Reformation', in: C. Trinkaus and H. Oberman (eds.), *The Pursuit of Holiness in Late Medieval and Renaissance Religion* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1974), pp. 496-502, at p. 501.

⁷⁶ John Calvin, 'The Form of Prayers and Songs of the church, 1542 Letter to the Reader', *op. cit.*, p. 165.

⁷⁷ Walter Blankenburg, 'Church Music in Reformed Europe', Hans Heinsheimer (trans.), in: Friedrich Blume, *Protestant Church Music: A History* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1975), pp. 507-90, at pp. 527-8; Weeda, *op. cit.*, p. 29; Marti and Polman, *op. cit.*, p. 79. In addition, it should be noted that the melodies contained rests and a final, extra long note at the end of each strophe.

⁷⁸ Blankenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 523.

melody serve the text, it may well be that this process actually gave the melody its own voice. For, to use Daniel Chua's metaphor, the melody did not 'hug the contours' of the text⁷⁹. We can see this clearly if we look at the settings for two metrical psalms from the Geneva Psalter, Psalm 118 and Psalm 50.

Let us start by looking at the setting for Psalm 118 (plate 4), which was devised in Strasbourg in 1545 and revised by Loys Bourgeois in Geneva in 1551⁸⁰. As Robert Weeda notes, there is much musical artistry in the setting. Each strophe consists of eight lines and is divided into two equal parts of four lines each. Each part has its own internal unity, but also relates to the other part. For example, the melody for line 1 is repeated in line 3 and the final three notes of the line are repeated in line 7, whilst line 8 is a repeat of line 4. It operates within the confines discussed above, i.e. the range is one octave, the notes are either short or long and it conforms, with the exception of line 5, to the first pattern described by Blankenburg above. In addition, there is only one note per syllable. But despite this, there does not seem to be a consistently close relationship between the melody and the meaning of the text, something I ascribe, in part, to the fact that, like the other metrical psalms in the Psalter, it is not through-composed. Admittedly, as the melody of line 4 is repeated in line 8, the words 'dure perpétuellement' (NRSV: '...endures for ever') are sung to the same tune on each occasion in the first strophe. Further, one could argue that the descending notes in these lines give the idea of a release of tension, a metaphor for the comfort one feels in knowing that God's faithfulness and

⁷⁹ Chua, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

⁸⁰ Weeda, *op. cit.*, p. 195.

mercy last for ever. However, I feel there is a certain ambiguity, even irony, when the same, descending melody is used for Marot's line 40, 'Ilz seront par moy ruynez' (NRSV: 'I cut [my enemies] off'). A similar example is that the same notes that are used to sing line 1, 'Rendez à Dieu Louange et gloire', (NRSV: 'O give thanks to the Lord') are also used to sing line 41, 'Ilz m'avoient enclos comme abeilles'⁸¹ (NRSV: 'They surrounded me like bees'). Conversely, sometimes the same text is set to two different melodies. For example, in Marot's text line 29, 'Mieux vault avoir en Dieu fiance' (NRSV: 'It is better to take refuge in the Lord'), is repeated in line 31⁸². However, in the first instance it will be sung to line 5 of the melody and in the second to line 7, which are musically quite different from each other.

Let us now look at the setting for Psalm 50 (plate 5), to see if we can detect a similar pattern of artistry on the one hand, but a distance between music and text on the other. Again, Robert Weeda provides an excellent account of the musical quality of this setting and it must be said, in the first instance, that this artistry in some cases does bring the meaning of music and text close together. For example, the pattern of tension and release conveyed in the rising and falling of the notes in each line does reflect, to an extent, the tenor of the Psalm, which is that God will punish those who do not honour him, but bless those who do⁸³. Further, there are instances where the melody supports the intention of Marot's versification. For example, there is a rhyme in lines 41-2 which is emphasized by the music. They run,

⁸¹ Reuben, *op. cit.*, p. 260.

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 197.

⁸³ Weeda, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

Ta bouche metz à mal et mesdisances;

*Ta langue brasse et fraudes et myssances,*⁸⁴

This is supported by the fall from A to E at the end of line 5 of the strophe and the less dramatic fall from E to D at the end of line 6. That said, the meaning of these lines ((41-2) NRSV: 'You give your mouth free rein for evil, and your tongue frames deceit' (Ps. 50 :19)) is quite different from that of lines 5 and 6, '[Dieu] rayonnera de lumière si belle. / Notre Dieu vient; déjà il vous appelle' (NRSV: 'God shines forth. Our God comes and does not keep silence...' (Ps. 50 :3)), although both are set to the same part of the melody. Again, the melody of line 5 is also used for Marot's line 35, 'Et prens ma loy en ta bouche maligne'⁸⁵ (NRSV 'or take my covenant on your [wicked] lips' (Ps. 50 :16)), but this has quite a different meaning from line 5 of Marot's metrical psalm ('God shines forth').

There are plenty of other examples of this disjunction of text and music, but the point I wish to make is that however closely the authors of the Geneva Psalter may have tried to marry text with melody, the melody still carries meaning which is sometimes at variance with that of the text it supports. However simple a melody, it will still 'speak' to us with its own voice and reveal meaning which is independent of the text to which it is joined. The simple rising and falling of a melody can talk of tension and release, two C[#] s, or Eb s for that matter, of the same value in succession can talk of constancy and so on. So, we can see that if Calvin allowed for music within worship purely in order to edify the faithful with the words of the Psalms, he failed in this attempt. For musical sound like other art

⁸⁴ Reuben, *op. cit.*, p. 241.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 238.

forms carries meaning. I have given one interpretation of the meaning of the melodies for the metrical psalms 118 and 50 in the Geneva Psalter, but there may be others.

This openness of meaning may concern some. I suggest, though, that this is something we find elsewhere in the Reformed tradition and that rather than being a cause for concern, it allows for interpretations in accordance with the theology of the tradition which may previously have been discounted⁸⁶.

We find openness, for example, in both words and architecture. In the case of the former, we need only think of the breadth of meaning ascribed by exegetes to certain Biblical passages to acknowledge that this is so. In the case of the latter, as we will see in the next two chapters, however much the decoration of Reformed churches is pared down, the architectural language used to construct them can still speak to us in a variety of ways⁸⁷. Openness of meaning is something we also see in works of visual art, and rather than being afraid of it, we should embrace it as it allows us to interpret certain works in a manner that is consonant with Reformed theology, something I attempt to demonstrate in Chapters Six and Seven. And this, of course, gives us a further reason to support their use in Reformed churches.

However, if there are still some who are concerned that this openness might lead us towards readings that are at variance with what God has already revealed to us, then they

⁸⁶ We will see this in particular when we look at works of visual art by Rembrandt and Jacob van Ruisdael in Chapters Six and Seven.

⁸⁷ See Chapters Four and Five. It is worth reflecting on the fact that even the whitewashed walls and clear glass windows that we often associated with Reformed church buildings are not devoid of meaning.

might consider using guidelines such as those proposed by Calvin Seerveld⁸⁸. These will help them to determine whether what they learn from works of visual art leads them towards the truth⁸⁹ or away from it.

But, returning to the main argument where we are looking at the relationship between text and melody in the Geneva Psalter, it is not only the fact that the melody sometimes has a meaning independent of that in the text which should lead us to conclude that Calvin did not succeed in his attempt to edify the faithful with the words of the Psalms alone. For he also failed in this regard by including some texts in the Geneva Psalter which were drawn from other sources.

Changes over time to the contents of the Psalters edited by Calvin

For example, the 1539 Strasbourg Psalter included not only eighteen metrical psalms, but also versifications of the *Nunc Dimittis* and The Ten Commandments⁹⁰. This does not

⁸⁸ Calvin Seerveld (1971), *op. cit.*, p. 168. The first of Seerveld's guidelines is that 'achieved knowledge is true if the product develops Christ's lordship of the world (rather than the devil's) and pleases Him'. He goes on to say that if the knowledge one acquires 'builds up in the faith those who receive it, then that knowledge is standing, working, being established in Truth'.

Secondly, he writes, 'Knowledge gained is *correct* if the relative states of affairs known are kept relative, limited, related to the rest of the world in its (proper) place'. He explains this by saying that if knowledge 'upholds the defined relationality of matters, then it is meaningful to call such knowledge correct knowledge, for it has been constrained by cosmic order'. In other words, if the knowledge we gain does not challenge the relationship between entities in our world, it is correct knowledge.

Seerveld's third test is that the 'knowledge obtained is accurate if the subject's knowing agrees with the structural laws ... concerning a particular feature or function of a knowable object'. This means that the knowledge must not contradict the laws which govern the attributes of a certain object.

I agree with Seerveld's first test, although I think that it would be premature to reject knowledge based on the other two tests immediately. Rather, we should reserve judgment, until further knowledge makes it clear whether we should accept it or reject it. However, these tests of truth provide us with a good start in the attempt to judge the truth of what we learn from visual art, as well as from other forms of art.

⁸⁹ See Chapter Two, where one definition I give of the truth is Godly revealed reality.

⁹⁰ Terry, *op. cit.*, pp. 109-110, and Leaver, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-2. A further point of interest is the question of how Calvin translates the second commandment in his versification of the Ten Commandments. It runs, 'Image point ne forgeras, / Pour mon *essence* figurer / Pour invoquer et honnorer, / Ma gloire leur assignant' (my italics). (John Calvin, *La Forme des Prières et Chantz Ecclésiastiques*, CR.XXXIV, CO VI,-

stray too far from the path of limiting singing to psalmody, as the texts are still based on passages from the Bible. But, as several commentators note, this Psalter also includes a setting for the Creed, which is not, of course, a Biblical text⁹¹. When we move on to the 1542 Geneva Psalter, what we find is a certain amount of disagreement amongst scholars about its contents. It is generally agreed that this edition again included versifications of both the *Nunc Dimittis* and the Ten Commandments, but the assertion by some that it also included settings for the Creed and for the Lord's Prayer is disputed by others⁹². There is more agreement about the contents of the 1562 Geneva Psalter, although here again there is not unanimity. It is clear that this did not include settings for the Creed or for the Lord's Prayer, but it did still include the *Nunc Dimittis* and the Ten Commandments. In addition, it included 'some rare canticles' that had not been in the first editions of Calvin's Psalter, although whether *The Canticle of Moses* was amongst these is not certain⁹³.

p. 213). ('You will not make an image, / to represent my *essence* / or to call on it or honour it / giving it my glory' (my translation)).

In other words, here at any rate, Calvin seems to believe that the second commandment forbids the making of an image for two reasons: firstly, if someone is trying to represent the essence of God or, secondly, if they give the honour due to God to any such image.

If these are the only limits which the Decalogue places on the making of religious images, and works of visual art in general, then I would argue that this allows for the making of, and indeed placing in church of, many other types of visual art, as long as we do not give them the honour due to God. See also Chapter One.

⁹¹ Begbie (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 12, and Cottret, *op. cit.*, p. 172. See also Terry, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-112.

⁹² Beza, *op. cit.*, p. 6; Weeda, *op. cit.*, p. 9; Begbie (2002), *op. cit.*, p. 12, n. 30, and Leaver, *op. cit.*, p. 46. For the assertion that the 1542 Psalter included settings for the Creed and for the Lord's Prayer, see: *La Forme des Prières et Chants Ecclésiastiques (1542) - édition; Fac-simile de l'édition originale d'après l'exemplaire de la Bibliothèque de Stuttgart, avec une notice par Pierre Pidoux* (Kassel: Edition Bärenreiter, 1959), p. 4.

⁹³ Cottret, *op. cit.*, p. 173, n. 47, and Beza, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

Despite the disagreement amongst scholars over the contents of the various Psalters, we can make two firm conclusions. First, that they and by extension Calvin allowed for the singing of non-Psalms in worship, and this may have included non-Biblical material. Secondly, the contents of the Psalters changed over time. Perhaps we should not be surprised by this, as it is entirely in keeping with one aspect of the principle of accommodation that Calvin asserts in *Institutes*. He writes,

*...because [outward discipline and ceremonies] are not necessary to salvation, and for the upbuilding of the church [they] ought to be variously accommodated to the customs of each nation and age, it will be fitting ... to change and abrogate traditional practices and to establish new ones*⁹⁴.

Indeed, it is interesting to note that over time there have been many developments in the music used for worship in the Reformed tradition. And it is from considering Calvin's understanding of music to looking in detail at some of these later developments that I now turn. What will be of particular interest here is that some of the new modes of worship used in this tradition differ both ontologically and epistemologically from the music that Calvin advocated and allowed for in the Geneva Psalter.

Changes in the ontology and epistemology of Reformed worship since Calvin's time

During Calvin's own time, there was no use of musical instruments in Reformed worship. He himself did not condemn instruments outright, but did specifically exclude their use in church, saying that singing in worship should be unaccompanied⁹⁵. In the early days after

⁹⁴ *Institutes* IV, x, 30. See also Chapter Two, and Schuringa, *op. cit.*, pp. 137-8.

⁹⁵ Weeda, *op. cit.*, pp. 25-6. See also: Calvin's sermon on Deuteronomy 10: 17-21 in: *CR LV, CO XXVII*,

Calvin, this led to paradoxical situations such as that of the Dutch composer and organist, Jan Sweelinck (1562-1621). In Amsterdam, as elsewhere in the Netherlands, the *Oude Kerk*, where Sweelinck was the organist, was managed by the civic authorities. They retained an organ in the building, but Sweelinck only played it outside the times of church services, as the Reformed community which worshipped there did not allow for musical accompaniment to its psalmody, following a decision at the Synod of Dordrecht in 1574⁹⁶. Despite this official opposition to the use of organs in worship in the Dutch Reformed Church, it seems that there was an intense on-going debate between those who opposed their use and those who advocated it⁹⁷. By the middle of the seventeenth century, those who supported its use seem to have made their case sufficiently strongly for organs to begin to be used in worship. They were doubtless helped by having the eminent statesman Constantijn Huygens (1596 -1687) on their side, who wrote an impassioned plea for the use of the organ in worship entitled *Gebruyck of ongebruyck van 't Orgel in de kercken der Vereenighde Nederlanden* ('Use or non-use of the organ in the churches of the United Netherlands')⁹⁸.

pp. 59-72, at p. 69.

⁹⁶ Blankenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 570.

⁹⁷ Andrew Pettegree, 'Coming to terms with victory: the upbuilding of a Calvinist church in Holland, 1572-1590', in: A. Pettegree et al. (eds.), *Calvinism in Europe 1540-1620* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), pp. 160-180, at p. 179. For a detailed account of this struggle, see: N. C. Kist, 'Het Kerkelijke Orgelbruik, bijzonder in Nederland: Een historic onderzoek' in: N. C. Kist and H. J. Royaards (collected), *Archief voor Kerkelijke Geschiedenis 10/1840*, pp. 189-334.

⁹⁸ Constantijn Huygens, *Gebruyck of ongebruyck van 't Orgel in de kercken der Vereenighde Nederlanden*, F. L. Zwaan (ed.) (Amsterdam: B. V. Noord-Hollandsche Uitgevers Maatschappij, 1974). It is also worth noting that the Netherlands were not the only place where instruments were being introduced into worship in the seventeenth century. For example, in western Switzerland wind instruments also began to be used in Reformed worship at this time. See: Marti and Polman, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

Even though at this point singing was still limited to metrical psalmody, it is likely that the introduction of the organ would have led to the rise of harmony as an important feature in Reformed worship. Within harmony, the chordal structure underlying the melody becomes more important and the tune on which the words rest less prominent⁹⁹, and perhaps less memorable. This may have detracted from the educative value of the psalms on which Calvin placed so much emphasis. In addition, the harmony may have added extra layers of meaning which would have been at variance with the meaning of the words, a process similar to that which I described above in relation to Psalms 118 and 50 in the Geneva Psalter.

But, as well as changes to the melody, over time we also see fundamental changes to the words used in Reformed worship. This is clearly illustrated by considering the work of Isaac Watts (1674-1748), who came from the Dissenting tradition, which traces its roots via the Puritans back to Calvin¹⁰⁰. Watts was clearly dissatisfied with the practice of psalmody in his church. He was opposed both to the manner in which it was sung and also its contents.

In 1719-20, he published a collection entitled *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, to which he added a foreword entitled 'Preface to the Hymns'¹⁰¹. Here, he attacks the practice of 'lining out', whereby the minister would read a line of a psalm and the congregation would

⁹⁹ John Leach, *Hymns and Spiritual Songs: The Use of Traditional and Modern in Worship* (Nottingham: Grove Books, 1995), p. 7.

¹⁰⁰ For the development of the Dissenting tradition from Puritanism, see: Patrick Collinson, 'Puritanism', in: *OCCT*, op. cit., pp. 583-4, at p. 583. For the link from Puritanism back to Calvinism, see: John Morgan, *Godly Learning: Puritan Attitude Towards Reason, Learning and Education 1560-1640* (Cambridge: CUP, 1986), p. 306.

¹⁰¹ Robert Goodacre (ed.), *The Psalms and Hymns of the Late Dr. Isaac Watts, Vol. II* (London: Francis Westley, 1821), pp. 5-8.

sing it back¹⁰². The practice was made popular by the *Westminster Directory*, published in London in 1644, and at that time seems to have served a valuable purpose. It states, 'but for the present, where many in the Congregation cannot read, it is convenient that the Minister ... do read the Psalm, line by line, before the singing thereof'. But, as Harry Escott points out, expedient, resulting from the high level of illiteracy, became 'hoary custom'¹⁰³, and lining out remained standard practice well into the eighteenth century. As Robin Leaver notes, for Watts lining-out '...often made both verbal and musical nonsense'¹⁰⁴, and for this reason he challenged its use. This reminds us that churches should always reflect on why they have certain practices and should also be prepared to modify those practices where the original reasons for them no longer persist. This is of course in line with Calvin's own belief that churches should be willing to adapt their practices to existing circumstances¹⁰⁵, and this is a principle that churches in the Reformed tradition should be willing to apply to the question of works of visual art. For, as I discuss at several point in this thesis, the circumstances in which we find ourselves today differ significantly from those which existed in Calvin's time and which led him to argue for the exclusion of all works of art from churches¹⁰⁶.

Returning to our discussion of Watts, let us look at his other major concern with the metrical psalms used for worship in his church, namely their content. In his 'Preface to the

¹⁰² For a description of the practice of lining out, see: Harry Escott, *Isaac Watts: Hymnographer* (London: Independent Press, 1962), p. 105.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Robin A. Leaver, 'Music and Christianity' in: Alister E. McGrath (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Modern Christian Thought* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp. 388-394, at p. 389.

¹⁰⁵ *Institutes* IV, x, 30.

¹⁰⁶ Schuringa, *op. cit.*, pp. 138-43.

Hymns' in *Hymns and Spiritual Songs*, he wrote that the metrical psalms were sometimes at variance with the spirit of the Gospel¹⁰⁷, i.e. they did not take account of the consequences of the incarnation, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. With specific reference to Psalm 69, he writes,

*While we are kindling into divine Love by the meditations of the Loving-Kindness of God, and the multitude of his tender Mercies, with a few Verses, some dreadful Curse against Men is proposed to our lips; that God would add Iniquity unto their Iniquity, nor let them come into his Righteousness, but blot them out of the Book of the Living, Psal. lxi. 26-28. which is so contrary to the new Commandment of loving our Enemies; and even under the Old Testament is best accounted for, by referring it to the spirit of prophetic vengeance*¹⁰⁸.

Watts argued that it was important in worship to sing of the saving grace of Christ and to this end he produced some paraphrases of the psalms which took account of the New Testament Gospel. We can see this if we compare the opening lines of his paraphrase of Psalm 21 with those of the metrical psalm of Theodore Beza in the Geneva Psalter.

¹⁰⁷ Indeed, it is interesting to note that the ideas that informed Watts' composition of metrical psalms are somewhat different from those which informed the composers of the metrical psalms in the Geneva Psalter. Firstly, as Temperley et al. argue, his metrical psalms are 'so freely paraphrased ... that... [they] cannot be clearly demarcated from hymn[s]'. See: Nicholas Temperley, Howard Slenk, Jan Luth et al., 'Psalms, metrical' in: *Grove, Volume 20, Pohlmann to Recital*, pp. 483-518, at p. 483. Secondly, and more specifically, it seems that Watts was keen to produce metrical psalms which overcame the distance between the Psalms of David and the Gospel that he saw in other psalmody and which he attacked in his 'Preface to the Hymns'. This can be seen succinctly in the title of Watts' book of metrical psalms: 'The Psalms of David Imitated in the language of the New Testament'. See: Robert Goodacre (ed.), *The Psalms and Hymns of the Late Dr. Isaac Watts, Vol. I* (London: Francis Westley, 1821), p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ Goodacre (ed.), *Vol. II, op. cit.*, p. 5.

Beza's versification runs,

O Lord, the king rejoices,

He owes to your strength

His great deliverance.

With what joy he is filled

Suddenly to see himself

*Saved by your power*¹⁰⁹.

Watts' paraphrase of the same passage runs,

David rejoiced in God his strength,

Rais'd to the throne by special grace;

But Christ, the Son, appears at length,

*Fulfil the triumph and the praise*¹¹⁰.

One reason that Watts may have felt the need to emphasize Christ's work in the world in his paraphrases is that the distance between metrical psalmody and the Gospel seemed greater to him than to Calvin and his contemporaries because the idea that King David was the typological pre-cursor of Christ, which was still current in the sixteenth century, had lost much of its force in the intervening two hundred years¹¹¹.

This change, perhaps even down-grading, of David's position within Watts' psalmody is

¹⁰⁹ French: *Seigneur, le roi se réjouit / Il doit à ta puissance / Sa grande délivrance; / De quelle joie il est rempli / Tout à coup de se voir / Sauvé par ton pouvoir.* Weeda, *op. cit.*, p. 171. (My translation). Compare the NRSV translation: 'In your strength the king rejoices O Lord, and in your help how greatly he exults!'

¹¹⁰ Goodacre (ed.), *Vol. I, op. cit.*, p. 62.

¹¹¹ Zim, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

also interesting because, as the reader will remember, the psalmody of the Geneva Psalter was informed by the idea that David was a spiritual model, after whom worshippers could mould their own character as they sang and reflected upon the Psalms¹¹². As we noted earlier¹¹³, the 'I' of David also became the 'I' of the worshipper. This connection was now lost. In its stead we see the rise of the 'I' of personal experience¹¹⁴. It is this 'I' that we see in Watts' great hymn, 'When I survey the wondrous Cross', which although it includes references to Galatians 6: 14¹¹⁵, marks along with other hymns a further shift away from using Biblical texts themselves as the primary basis for worship. I wonder whether we might even say that this is the 'I' of individualism, where although the relationship between the worshipper and God is emphasized, the position of the 'I' is no longer tempered by reference to a spiritual model such as David. Arguably, this is something that is even more pronounced in modern worship songs such as Geoff Bullock's 'You rescued me', written in 1992. This runs,

*You rescued me, and picked me up,
a living hope of grace revealed,
A life transformed in righteousness,
O Lord, You have rescued me.
Forgiving me, You healed my heart,
and set me free from sin and death.*

¹¹² See pp. 67-8 above.

¹¹³ See p. 74 above.

¹¹⁴ Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 162.

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p. 160.



You brought me life, You made me whole,

O Lord, You have rescued me.

And You loved me before I knew You,

And You knew me for all time.

I've been created in Your image, O Lord.

And You bought me and You sought me,

Your blood poured out for me;

A new creation in Your image,

O Lord. You rescued me, You rescued me¹¹⁶.

The first person singular personal and possessive pronouns appear some eighteen times in this song and this number would increase if any part of the song were repeated. Some will reply that this is fine, for the second person singular personal and possessive pronouns referring to God the Son appear sixteen times, and there are also several instances of the phrase 'O Lord'. However, as well as not giving the worshipper the opportunity to associate his or her 'I' with a spiritual model, we should also note that in this song, the emphasis often falls on the word 'me' and not on the word 'You'. For example, of the first four instances of the word 'me', three fall on the first beat of the bar, where the stress is most marked. By contrast, none of the first four instances of 'You' falls on the first beat of the bar. So, here again we see the importance of the non-vocal part of a song to its meaning and this example reminds us that whereas harmony came to replace melody in

¹¹⁶ Peter Horrobin and Greg Leavers (eds.), *Complete Mission Praise: Music Edition* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1999), song 1020.

the seventeenth century and beyond, it is now rhythm and beat that are paramount in giving songs their structure¹¹⁷.

We will return to look at rhythm and beat shortly, but first I want to look at some other features that emphasize the difference between music as Calvin understood it in the context of worship, and music as it is understood today.

Let us begin by looking at songs in a worship book currently used throughout the United Reformed Church in England, *Rejoice and Sing*. It might be instructive to look at the setting for a psalm in this book to see how this differs from settings for the metrical psalms in the Geneva Psalter. The reader will remember that in the Geneva Psalter, the melodies were very much pared down, with only two lengths of note being used, no melismata and a range of no greater than one octave. If we look at the setting for psalm 1 in *Rejoice and Sing*, we see that the melody is a traditional Thai melody¹¹⁸. It has four different lengths of note, several melismata and the range is from middle C up to the Eb above the C above middle C. I suggested above that the attempt to pare down the melodies in the Geneva Psalter may have been one reason why the meaning of the tunes did not always match that of the words. Although this modern setting is less restricted, here again we find that the meaning of the melody and the text may not be that close. This may in part be due to the fact that, as with the metrical psalms of the Geneva Psalter, it is not through-composed. The psalm is arranged in four verses of four lines each, and each verse uses the same melody. The first two lines of verse 1 are 'Happy are they who walk in God's wise way; /

¹¹⁷ Leach, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ *Rejoice and Sing: Melody Edition* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), p. 734.

happy who shun the sinful choice'. The first two lines of verse 3 run 'Fretful and anxious are the sinners' days, / barren and lonely is their path'. Clearly these sets of words have very different meanings, yet are sung to the same melody.

By way of contrast, elsewhere in *Rejoice and Sing* we see two short songs of six lines each set to the same tune. Both are songs of praise and in both cases the mood of the melody, 'Grafton', seems to match the meaning of the words more closely than the melody for Psalm 1 that we have just looked at¹¹⁹. That said, we again see a melody quite different from those used in the Geneva Psalter. Whereas these are often marked by their restraint, in this melody more than half the bars contain melismata, there are four lengths of note, including many quavers, and the range goes from B below middle C to E above the C above middle C. What is perhaps more interesting though is that the words of the second song are a medieval Latin doxology, translated into English¹²⁰. This runs 'Unto God be praise and honour: / to the Father, to the Son, / to the mighty Spirit, glory - / ever Three and ever One: / power and glory in the highest / while eternal ages run'. Now, it is clear that the theology expressed in this doxology would not have caused Calvin any difficulties, and we should of course remember that he accepted much of what was written by theologians important to the medieval Catholic Church such as Augustine of Hippo and Bernard of Clairvaux. However, I suggest that the fact that this doxology was used in the worship of the Roman Catholic Church would have been a sufficiently strong reason for Calvin to exclude it from use in Reformed church services, as he was very keen to keep

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 20-21. The songs are numbers 22 and 23.

¹²⁰ Song 23, 'Unto God be praise and honour...'.

the distance between worship in the Reformed tradition and that of the Catholic Church as great as possible¹²¹. But, as time has passed, his successors in the Reformed tradition may have considered that this need has become less urgent. This may also help explain why *Rejoice and Sing* carries not only a medieval Latin doxology, but also songs composed and sung in Latin. Calvin would not have allowed for this, not only because he thought it important that worshippers should sing in the vernacular so as to understand what they were singing¹²², but also because of the associations of using Latin in worship with Roman Catholic practice. The songs in question are the Taizé chants, *Ubi caritas et amor* and *Laudate, omnes gentes, laudate Dominum*¹²³. Perhaps these songs are allowed for today because Latin can be seen as the language of no nation, yet of every nation, a language in which everyone can sing without feeling that their own language has priority or is being ignored. But, I think it is reasonable to ask whether everyone who sings these verses understands them, and if they do not, we again see a further shift away from Calvin's guidelines on what constituted appropriate worship.

Another community that has developed many songs for worship in recent times is the Iona Community. We find one of its songs in *Rejoice and Sing*, but although this short refrain is written in English and can thus be understood by those who sing it, I wonder whether the theology that it expresses is in keeping with orthodox Reformed theology. It runs

¹²¹ Of course, Calvin did allow for a very limited number of songs that had been used in worship in the Catholic Church, such as the *Nunc Dimittis*. However, this is a Biblical text and for this reason Calvin would have allowed for it to be used in Reformed worship, but not, I argue, the Latin doxology.

¹²² John Calvin, 'The Form of Prayers and Songs of the church, 1542 Letter to the Reader', *op. cit.*, pp. 161 and 164.

¹²³ *Rejoice and Sing*, *op. cit.*, p. 437, songs 402 and 403.

‘Through our lives and by our prayers, your kingdom come’¹²⁴. It may be that the intent of the song is to remind us that God can work through us to build his kingdom on earth, but I wonder whether this song is telling us that it is by our efforts as much as by those of God that his kingdom will come into the world. Such a theological position would of course be at variance with that of Calvin, who believed that God’s kingdom could come about regardless of our own efforts¹²⁵. We cannot be certain which reading is correct, but if it is the latter one then this would be somewhat ironic, for the Iona Community was founded by a minister of the (Reformed) Church of Scotland, George MacLeod, in 1938¹²⁶.

Rejoice and Sing contains a wide range of melodies and texts and this reflects the eclectic range of worship styles used today in churches in the Reformed tradition. In some more conservative churches, unaccompanied monodic psalmody is still preferred¹²⁷. In others, both psalmody and hymnody are used, with only an organ for accompaniment¹²⁸. However, some churches are embracing more contemporary worship styles and we are

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p. 436, song 401.

¹²⁵ For a good discussion of Calvin’s position, which may be seen as a move away from the medieval idea of God as *primary cause* acting in the world through people and things as *secondary causes*, see: Gary B. Deason, ‘Reformation Theology and the Mechanistic Conception of Nature’ in: David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (eds.), *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science* (London: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 167-191, and Schreiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-32. I discuss this matter in more detail in Chapter Seven.

¹²⁶ William Storrar, ‘From *Braveheart* to faint-heart: Worship and culture in postmodern Scotland’ in: Bryan Spinks and Iain Torrance (eds.), *To Glorify God: Essays on Modern Reformed Liturgy* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1999), pp. 69-84, at p. 74.

¹²⁷ See for example a psalter published for The Reformed Presbyterian Church of Ireland, *The Psalms in Metre: Scottish Metrical Version* (London: OUP, 1979). This book merely contains metrical psalms and guides to how they are to be intoned in the form of doh, ray, mi etc.

¹²⁸ This style of worship is common in orthodox Reformed churches in the Netherlands such as the Nieuwe Kerk and St.-Bavokerk, Haarlem, and the Oude Kerk, Amsterdam, in all of which I have worshipped since May, 2004.

reminded of this in *Rejoice and Sing* by the presence of guitar chords over the staves of some of the songs¹²⁹. Guitars can be used to provide a gentle backing to solo singing, which can induce a 'mood of vulnerability or timelessness'¹³⁰. They can also be used to play a certain rhythm and this reminds us of how rhythm, as I began to discuss above, has become an important feature in the structure of modern worship songs¹³¹. They are sometimes accompanied by drum kits and the combination of these instruments, with their emphasis on rhythm and beat, can often give worship a sense of ritual, which may lead worshippers towards an ecstatic or even transcendent experience. Sometimes music groups include melody instruments such as violins and flutes. These may be played between verses and even when worshippers are not singing, in so-called 'instrumentals', to give them time to reflect and draw closer to God. Often, they will be played in higher registers, giving a sense of the transcendent and violins in particular may be played quickly in a way that creates a sense of frenzy or ecstasy¹³².

I wonder if in all this talk of transcendence, we find in some modern worship music a parallel with the ancient concept of the music of the spheres, whereby music was deemed in some sense to connect heaven and earth, and from which the music of Calvin and his

¹²⁹ See 'I enter his gates with thanksgiving in my heart' in: *Rejoice and Sing*, *op. cit.*, pp. 426-7. From my own experience, a worship band including clarinets and violins played at the United Reformed Church, Claypath, Durham until summer, 2003.

¹³⁰ *In Tune With Heaven: The Report of the Archbishops' Commission on Church Music* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1992), p. 150.

¹³¹ Leach, *op. cit.*, p. 7. See also chapter 4 of James F. White, *Protestant Worship: Traditions in Transition* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1989) for a good account of developments in Reformed worship in recent times.

¹³² *In Tune with Heaven*, *op. cit.*, pp. 150 ff.

fellow humanists became ontologically detached¹³³. I believe we do find such a parallel, but with one vital difference. Whereas the music of the spheres was considered to emanate from the heavens and come down to earth, in modern worship music, we see things travelling in the opposite direction. Here, worshippers are encouraged to reach out to heaven¹³⁴ and to draw back the veil that separates us from God which for some is the defining feature of the Reformation¹³⁵. Rhythm and repetition have become paramount and they provide the worshipper with the means to escape time and earthly experience. The words in these songs can often, though by no means always, be over simplistic¹³⁶ and certainly take us a long way from the texts of Calvin's metrical psalmody. Although like the psalms, the texts of these new songs often have 'I' as their subject, this 'I' has become detached from the spiritual model of David, and can easily lead to the worshipper's preoccupation with self, and even to selfishness.

Such observations by no means cover all songs used in Reformed worship, but are an indication of trends which mark a significant shift away from the ontology and epistemology of music as Calvin understood it. With these changes in mind, it is perhaps worth our while now to look at changes to the understanding of visual art over a similar period. What the reader may find surprising here is that, despite the formal differences that I discuss above, certain types of visual art, in particular history and landscape

¹³³ See pp. 83-86 above. See also: Haar, *op. cit.*, pp. 487-8.

¹³⁴ There is a sense in which this is reminiscent of Ovid's description of the giants' attempt to reach heaven in Book I of his *Metamorphoses*. See: Ovid, *Metamorphoses Books I-VIII*, Frank Justus Miller (trans.), 3rd edition (London: Harvard University Press, 1977), pp. 12-13.

¹³⁵ Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, pp. 151 ff.

¹³⁶ A good critique of the strengths and weaknesses of modern worship music can be found in: Peter Moger, *Music and worship: Principles to Practice* (Nottingham: Grove Books Ltd., 1994), esp. pp. 17-19. One modern composer who does seem to marry good music with meaningful text is Stuart Townend.

paintings, have as much in common with Calvin's understanding of music, reflected in particular in the metrical psalms devised by Clément Marot that I consider in detail shortly, as does the modern worship music that I have just described. And it is here that we find the opportunity to hold together most closely accounts of the ontology and epistemology of Calvin's understanding of music with those of the ontology and epistemology of history and landscape paintings, which is our overall aim in this chapter.

Changes in the understanding of works of visual art

Although the matter is without doubt somewhat more complicated than I describe here¹³⁷, I suggest that the Reformation brought into sharp focus two streams in visual art that had been co-existing and intersecting with one another for some time before the sixteenth century. One of these streams was what one might call the religious image, which was marked out both by subject matter and by how the beholder interacted with it. Among the subjects of such images were the persons of the Trinity, Mary, and Biblical and non-Biblical saints¹³⁸. There is a sense in which for some the divinity represented in these images was seen to exercise their power through the images¹³⁹, and it was almost as if the divine power was felt to be present to the worshipper, ready to act on his or her behalf. It was this dynamic between the worshipper and the image, which for some led to the close association of the image with justification, that Reformers such as Luther, Zwingli and

¹³⁷ Here, I am primarily concerned with giving an account of the rise of the artist as the figure who interprets reality by the application of the imagination. I give a fuller account of the ontological distinction between the religious image and other forms of visual art in Chapter One. There, I note in particular that whether or not something is a religious image depends to an extent on the viewer.

¹³⁸ The reader will find many examples of medieval religious images in: Finaldi, *op. cit.*

¹³⁹ I suggest that this reflects the belief in secondary causality, prevalent in the Middle Ages, whereby God as primary cause was seen to act in the world through creatures or material entities as secondary causes. See n. 125 above, and Chapter Seven for further discussion on this. See also: Green, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

Calvin wanted to break¹⁴⁰.

The other stream that became more and more prominent during the sixteenth-century is one which is characterized by the increasing control of the subject by the artist¹⁴¹. Whereas one of the most important ideas underpinning the religious image was a sense in which there was a direct relationship between image and beholder, now the artist intervened and inserted a new level of meaning between the subject of a work and those who viewed it¹⁴².

There is a sense in which this new phenomenon had its roots in the religious image itself and the increasing use of naturalism¹⁴³ that we can see in works such as Giotto's *Passion Cycle* in the Scrovegni Chapel, Padua, completed in the early fourteenth century¹⁴⁴. Here, although the subject was a traditional one, we can see features that clearly mark it out as the work of Giotto. Over time, artists gained more and more control over the subject and this was mirrored by an increase in the range of subjects they chose to depict. Amongst these was the treatment of landscape as a subject in its own right, rather than merely as a backdrop to the depiction of a religious figure such as Mary or one of the other saints¹⁴⁵. Whereas previously, the religious image had naturally led the beholder to venerate the

¹⁴⁰ For a good account of late medieval piety and the challenges made to it by the Protestant Reformers, see: Belting, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-16.

¹⁴¹ I suggest that Calvin sometimes conflates these two streams and that he does so in particular in *Institutes* I, xi, 13. Here, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter One, he uses the word *imagines* to cover both religious images and other works of art where there is no relationship to the divine.

¹⁴² Belting, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

¹⁴³ For a fine account of the rise of naturalism in Western art, see: David Brown, *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), pp. 348 ff.

¹⁴⁴ Roberto Filippetti, *The Great Event According to Giotto: Scrovegni Chapel, Padua*, Janet Sethre (trans.) (Padua: Itaca, 2002).

¹⁴⁵ See Chapters One and Seven.

figure represented, now art was being produced which the artist could use to help the beholder explore and understand God's action in the world¹⁴⁶. We can see this clearly if we look at some of the landscape paintings that proliferated in seventeenth-century Netherlands. For example, Jacob van Ruisdael, whose work I discuss in more detail in Chapter Seven, used nature, or the second book of God's revelation, as his subject. But, rather than merely represent actual scenes, he would arrange the motives in his works in such a way as to deepen the beholder's understanding of God's activity in the world¹⁴⁷. For example, he would position the staffage and the trees in a painting in such a way as to provide a sense of balance between them. This would suggest to the beholder the order with which God suffuses the world. To achieve such effects, van Ruisdael necessarily engaged his imagination¹⁴⁸, and coming back to the overall theme of this chapter, which is to show that there are ontological and epistemological similarities between the metrical psalms advocated by Calvin and history and landscape paintings, I suggest that in like manner Clément Marot used his imagination in the production of his metrical psalms¹⁴⁹.

Marot's metrical psalms: where the imagination engages with Scripture

Marot did not merely produce literal translations of the Psalms, but created metrical psalms which helped those who sang them to deepen their understanding of the Psalms of David, and of how to address God. And just as landscape artists such as van Ruisdael

¹⁴⁶ Belting, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁷ Walford, *op. cit.*, pp. 20-28.

¹⁴⁸ H. Gerson, 'Jacob van Ruisdael (1629-1682) "Het Korenveld"', in: *Openbaar Kunstbezit* 8, 1964, pp. 21-21b.

¹⁴⁹ For a defence of the use of the imagination in the realm of artistic creativity within the Reformed tradition, see: John Bunyan's 'The Author's Apology for His Book' in: John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, G. B. Harrison (intro. and ed.) (London: Dent, 1954), pp. 1-7. I thank Ruth Etchells for bringing this to my attention.

helped beholders of their work to engage with the second book of God's revelation, namely his creation, so Marot helped those who sang his metrical psalms to engage with and better understand the first book of God's revelation, namely Scripture. And as we shall now see, he did this not only by capturing the letter of the Psalms, but also their spirit¹⁵⁰.

We have already seen how, in his metrical psalm for Psalm 13, Marot uses the rhetorical device of placing the phrase 'Jusques à quand' at ever more frequent intervals to bring out the increasing sense of desperation the psalmist feels¹⁵¹. In the same psalm, he often finishes the lines with a long syllable to communicate the same feeling¹⁵². David's plaintive mood is also underlined by the rhyme scheme that Marot uses for the psalm, aa, bb, a; cc, dd, c; etc., and by his use of short, eight syllable lines¹⁵³. Indeed, it seems that Marot made a conscious choice about which metre to use for which psalms¹⁵⁴ and this reflects the fact that he treated each psalm as an individual prayer¹⁵⁵. His art took account of the fact that the psalms would be sung and to this end, he avoided using the Alexandrine metre, as this was not considered a good metre for singing¹⁵⁶. In addition, he appropriated the forms of popular songs to help worshippers learn his new metrical psalms¹⁵⁷, and is credited with inventing new forms, such as *le sixain définitif sur trois rimes* ('the six-line verse (sextain)

¹⁵⁰ Reuben, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

¹⁵¹ See pp. 85-6 above.

¹⁵² Reuben, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

¹⁵³ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 140.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 161.

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p. 131. The Alexandrine metre consists of six iambic feet, usually with a caesura after the third foot.

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 160-1.

with three rhymes'), which again facilitated the singing of the psalms¹⁵⁸.

Given such artistry and creativity, one might reasonably ask how close Marot's metrical psalms were to the original Biblical texts. If one means by this, the Hebrew Massoretic text¹⁵⁹, then clearly Marot was at a disadvantage, for as one of his contemporaries, Joachim du Bellay, noted, his knowledge of Hebrew was at best limited¹⁶⁰. That said, he was clearly comfortable with Hebrew poetic forms, and would sometimes use Hebrew parallelism in his metrical psalms where none existed in the Hebrew in order to bring clarity to the text¹⁶¹. It may well be that Marot was familiar with the Bible translations of Christian Hebraists such as Olivétan, Bucer and Vatable¹⁶², but as Catherine Reuben wonderfully demonstrates, what Marot may have lacked in close knowledge of the original text, he made up for in his ability to bring out the underlying meaning of David's discourses with God¹⁶³. And although Marot was willing to manipulate the text quite significantly, cases where his translation of the Psalms might give exegetes any cause for concern are rare indeed.

One such case is his versification of Psalm 8: 4. Here, Marot does not translate the

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 132-3.

¹⁵⁹ To call this the original text of course has its own set of problems as the earliest Massoretic texts date from the end of the first millenium, A. D.

¹⁶⁰ Reuben, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 192.

¹⁶² *ibid.*, pp. 63 ff.

¹⁶³ See Reuben, *op. cit.*, Chapter 3 (esp. pp. 136 ff.), where she compares Marot's metrical psalms with the translations of the Psalms in the Vienna manuscript 2665. For a fine account of the complexities of translating the Psalms and of providing an adequate taxonomy for the translation of poetry in general, see: Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), pp. 3-13. Hamlin provides a particularly powerful insight into the art of the translators of this poetry by suggesting that their work may be compared to Hebrew *midrash* (pp. 11-12). He also provides a useful selection of works for further reading on this subject (p. 11, n. 37).

theologically loaded phrase *ben adam*, preferring to allow *l'homme* from the first half of the verse to cover it. Whilst this may be a correct rendering from a theological perspective, it does differ from an earlier version of his, where he translates it as *filz de l'homme* (lit. 'son of man')¹⁶⁴. It is possible, and this is admittedly my own thought on the matter, that this was removed when Calvin reviewed Marot's metrical psalms and it certainly mirrors Calvin's own silence on the phrase in his commentary on the verse¹⁶⁵. Which version is theologically correct is, of course, a matter of dispute¹⁶⁶, but by removing the phrase altogether, Marot can be seen to take a specific theological position, which may or may not be correct.

But, in the overall context of his metrical psalmody, this is no more than a quibble. What Marot's oeuvre provides us with is the product of an imaginative engagement with the first book of God's revelation. This helps the singer to both understand this revelation better and respond to it in a manner which can deepen their relationship with God.

Likewise, I suggest that what we have in the landscape paintings of Jacob van Ruisdael is an imaginative engagement with the second book of God's revelation, which allows us to deepen our understanding of God's activity in the world and respond to it appropriately.

¹⁶⁴ Reuben, *op. cit.*, p. 167. For the Hebrew, see *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, *op. cit.*, p. 1092.

¹⁶⁵ See Jeanneret, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-81. Here, Jeanneret discusses the changes from earlier to later versions of Marot's metrical psalms. He does not specifically discuss Psalm 8, but does say that the most likely reason for these changes was the intervention of Calvin. For Calvin's commentary on this verse, see: John Calvin, *Commentary on the Book of Psalms*, Vol. 1, James Anderson (trans. and ed.) (Edinburgh: Calvin Translation Society, 1845), pp. 99-101.

¹⁶⁶ It is interesting to note that in his commentary on Psalm 8: 4, Augustine of Hippo does see a need to distinguish between 'man' and 'Son of man' here. This is important because Augustine would have been seen as an important authority in Biblical exegesis at this time, and because Calvin, for whom in particular Augustine was such an important authority, chose an interpretation at variance with that of the Church Father. See: Augustin (sic), *Expositions on the Book of Psalms*, A. Cleveland Cox (ed.) (New York: The Christian Literature Company, 1888), p. 30.

We can take this idea one step further and argue that works of art that may be categorized as histories, which take as their subject Biblical themes, may also be seen as imaginative engagements with the first book of God's revelation.

I discuss the work of Rembrandt van Rijn, one artist who does this perhaps better than any other, in Chapter Six, and there is little doubt that Rembrandt adds elements to his paintings, etchings and drawings to deepen our understanding of the Biblical stories. A good example of this is his *The Woman Caught in Adultery* (Bredius 566)¹⁶⁷, where Rembrandt depicts an opulent background to contrast what Christ's enemies saw as beautiful with the eternal beauty of God's justice manifest in Christ himself¹⁶⁸.

We can also see this imaginative engagement with Scripture in the work of other artists influenced by the Reformed tradition, such as the woodcuts of Matthaeus Merian the Elder of Basel¹⁶⁹, re-produced in Dutch Bibles in the seventeenth century¹⁷⁰. Amongst Merian's woodcuts are some that depict stories from the life of King David, such as *Abigail Begg Forgiveness of David for Her Husband* (plate 6). Here, it is interesting to note that despite the formal differences between metrical psalms and woodcuts, we learn from both in a similar way, by turning the non-propositional language of poetry¹⁷¹ and visual art into propositions such as 'I should be merciful', or 'I should ask God's

¹⁶⁷ Bredius, *op. cit.*, p. 480. (See plate 3).

¹⁶⁸ See my article: 'How does the work of Rembrandt van Rijn represent a Calvinist Aesthetic?', *op. cit.*, p. 27.

¹⁶⁹ W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *Rembrandt and the Gospel*, K. Gregor Smith (trans.) (London: SCM Press, 1957), p. 29.

¹⁷⁰ Wilco C. Portman, *Bijbel en Prent, Vol. II* (The Hague: Uitgeverij Boekcentrum B. V., 1986), pp. 56 ff.

¹⁷¹ For an account of the language of poetry as non-propositional, see: Justus Buchler, *The Main of Light: On the Concept of Poetry* (London: OUP, 1974), pp. 148 ff.

forgiveness', which we may then act on. This reminds us that there are not only ontological similarities between Calvin's understanding of music and certain types of visual art, but also epistemological ones.

In this regard, we should recall finally that both words and visual art are open to interpretation and that far from being a danger this affords us the possibility of reading both, where appropriate, in a manner consonant with Reformed theology.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion, we see that certain categories of visual art, in particular histories and landscapes, have more in common with worship music as Calvin understood it than may at first be apparent. Secondly, in certain modern music we seem to have something by which people try to reach God, with the emphasis on ecstatic, momentary experience as opposed to the epistemological. Calvin himself wanted music to be dedicated to the praise of God, but he also wanted it to educate and to provide worshippers with a means of deepening their understanding of God's action in the world, whilst respecting and affirming his transcendence. In like manner, we can see works of visual art as educative and as a means by which we can meditate of God's action in the world, without attempting to reach up to him or to bring him down to earth¹⁷².

In this chapter, then, we have found arguments with which to affirm appropriate works of visual art by considering the ontology and epistemology of music as Calvin understood it and by reflecting on the developments of the music used in Reformed worship. In the next chapter, our attention shifts to another cultural artefact, architecture. Here, we will see

¹⁷² Belting, *op. cit.*, pp. 14-16.

that the internal arrangement, use of space and decorative styles associated with Reformed churches all provide us with further arguments for the use of appropriate works of visual art in these buildings. What we will also see is that our argument that works of visual art do not save, but can sanctify¹⁷³ means that it is particularly appropriate to use them in churches in the Reformed tradition, since for Calvin and his followers these were spaces that existed primarily for the sanctification of the elect.

¹⁷³ See Chapter Two, including in particular there my account of Calvin's understanding of beauty.

Chapter Four: The form and ontology of church in the Reformed Tradition

Introduction

In the last chapter we looked at how certain works of visual art have more in common with John Calvin's understanding of music than may at first seem to be the case. What we found of particular interest was that some of the music used in Reformed worship to-day is so different from that which Calvin advocated, that we might reasonably argue that there are more ontological and epistemological similarities between Calvin's understanding of music and these works of visual art than there are between his understanding of music and contemporary worship music.

In this chapter, I look at another cultural artefact, architecture, and suggest that the way that this has been used in the Reformed tradition, and the manner in which churches in this tradition have been ordered internally, provide yet more arguments for the use of works of visual art, particularly history and landscape paintings, in these churches. This will lead us into a discussion on Calvin's ontology of church, which will afford us, perhaps somewhat surprisingly, further arguments for the use of these two categories of painting.

Calvin on form and internal arrangement

Let us make a start, then, by looking at what Calvin himself said about the form and internal arrangement of church buildings. Or, to put it another way, what did Calvin think churches should look like? In short, the answer is that he did not write much on this subject. However, one of his overarching themes is that the church of his time should use

the 'ancient church' as a model for its appearance, mode of worship and teaching¹. For example, in *Institutes* Calvin suggests that for about the first five hundred years of Christianity, there was 'a purer doctrine thriving' and 'churches were commonly empty of *images*'². Calvin uses Augustine's attack on religious images to support his argument. However, I would counter that the very fact that Augustine made this attack shows that there were already religious images in churches by at least the end of the fourth century A. D.³. But, we can go back further than this and argue that there must already have been works of visual art, some of which may be seen as religious images, in churches at the beginning of that century. For, in 306 the local synod in Elvira, Spain, elected to prohibit wall paintings with biblical themes in churches⁴. As Guntram Koch notes, 'such a prohibition only makes sense if numerous churches had been decorated with such wall

¹ See *Institutes* I, xi, 13, in particular n. 23, where J. T. McNeill argues that Calvin appropriated this argument from the 'syncretists', who advocated 'the consensus of the first five centuries' as a basis for Christian unity and reform'. See also *Institutes* IV, iv, where Calvin again uses the early church as an authority when he describes the structure of church ministry that he is advocating.

² *Institutes* I, xi, 13. I use italics for the word *images* as the range of meaning in the term as Calvin used it makes it difficult to find an exact equivalent in the English language. See Chapter One for a discussion of this.

³ I discuss Calvin's use of Augustine's arguments against religious images in *Institutes* I, xi, 13 in Chapter One. Here, I would add that it seems that in the passages of Augustine's writings from which Calvin quotes, the Church Father is talking primarily about three-dimensional images based on the human form. Although as we have seen in the case of Zwingli's discussion of a statue of Charlemagne outside the Grossmünster, Zurich, and in that of a recent statue of John Knox in St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh (both discussed in Chapter One), three-dimensionality may not be a sufficient reason in itself to exclude a work of art from a church, there does seem to be a sense in which it is more clearly associated with idolatry than two-dimensionality. We note for example that Michael Camille tells us that along with colour, in the late Middle Ages three-dimensionality was seen as one of the markers of dangerous idolatry (see: Camille, *op. cit.*, p. 169). This of course is not to say that we should exclude three-dimensional works of visual art, nor is it to say that two-dimensional works of art have not been used for purposes that some may see as idolatrous. Rather, what it does say is that it is more likely that such practices will arise in association with three-dimensional works of visual art, perhaps because they somehow seem more real, particularly those created in a naturalistic style. These, it seems, are more prone to be confused with the reality they purport to represent than are less naturalistic depictions.

⁴ As I mention in Chapter One, Calvin would have known about this as he mentions the Council of Elvira in *Institutes* I, xi, 6.

paintings⁵. Nevertheless, despite the uncertain foundations on which he builds his argument, it is clear that Calvin preferred churches to be free not only of religious images, but of all works of visual art⁶.

Another clue as to how Calvin thought churches should look is his aversion to what he sees as pomp and ceremony. In *Institutes*, he argues that pomp is an indication of how far the Roman Catholic Church of his time had moved away from the models of Scripture and the early church. In a letter to King Edward VI of England in January 1551, he writes,

*We must always...insist that simplicity and order be observed in the use of ceremonies, so that the clear light of the Gospel be not obscured by them, ... and that the whole may serve and be suited to the edification of the Church*⁷.

So, although Calvin says very little about the specific form and internal arrangement of churches in his writings, we can get a reasonably good idea of what he would have preferred from his discussion of related subjects⁸.

The re-ordering of the Cathedral of St. Pierre, Geneva

Another way of assessing Calvin's attitude to how churches should look is to consider

⁵ Koch, *op. cit.*, pp. 88-9. As Koch notes (p. 88), it is likely that there were churches with wall paintings from early in the third century, although evidence from this period of the use of images in buildings dedicated specifically to worship is scarce. However, this likelihood merely re-affirms my overall contention that Calvin is wrong to say that churches in the first five centuries of Christianity were generally clear of *imagines* (i.e. religious images and works of art more generally (see Chapter One where I discuss this distinction in more detail)). See also: Miles, *op. cit.*

⁶ See the final section of Chapter One, where I discuss *Institutes* I, xi, 13 in much more detail.

⁷ J. Bonnet, *Letters of John Calvin, Vol. II* (ET) (New York: Burt Franklin, 1972) (Reprint of 1858 ed.), p. 302. See also: *Institutes* IV, x, 11 ff.

⁸ That said, one scholar who suggests that Calvin did allow for some 'ornament' in churches is Sergiusz Michalski. Michalski does not quote from Calvin's work directly, but bases his assertion on the work of P. Romane-Musculus (*La Prière des mains. L'église réformée et l'art* (Paris: 1938), p. 80). I have been unable to trace this reference, but have begun a communication with Professor Michalski to confirm his sources. See Michalski, *The Reformation and the Visual Arts* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 68 and p. 203, n. 61.

what happened in the city of Geneva, where Calvin spent two periods of ministry, the first from 1536-8 and the second from 1541 onwards. What we note here is that Calvin did not build a new church in Geneva, but rather altered the interior appointments of existing church buildings⁹. One of these buildings was the Cathedral of St. Pierre, which had been the diocesan cathedral of the Catholic bishop up to 1536¹⁰. By the time Calvin and his colleagues began preaching in the cathedral¹¹, there had already been many acts of iconoclasm and the walls had been whitewashed¹². Although he did not personally instigate these changes, the fact that he did preach in St. Pierre so soon after they had occurred allows us to assume that he did not object to their result, if not necessarily the manner in which they were achieved¹³. But changes to the internal appearance of the building were not limited to acts of iconoclasm alone. There were also radical changes to its layout. The cathedral was built in the form of a Latin cross and, before 1536, had contained both a rood screen and a choir. Not only were both of these demolished, but the pulpit, which had previously stood by the second pillar on the right in the nave (looking eastwards) was moved to the first pillar on the left¹⁴. This change had symbolic

⁹ Catherine Randall, *Building Codes: The Aesthetics of Calvinism in Early Modern Europe* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p. 31. In part, Randall ascribes this lack of new churches to a shortage of space in which to build them.

¹⁰ See: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09040a.htm> (accessed 13th January, 2005), and Monter, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

¹¹ T. H. L. Parker, *Calvin's Preaching* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1992), pp. 59-60. It is clear from what Parker says that Calvin did preach in St. Pierre during his first stay in Geneva, though it is not clear exactly when he did so for the first time. When he returned to Geneva in September 1541, he preached there almost immediately.

¹² Monter, *op. cit.*, pp. 13 and 53-4. See also: <http://switzerland.isyours.com/e/guide/geneva/oldtown.html> (accessed 13th January, 2005).

¹³ For Calvin's opposition to violence as a means of changing the existing religious order, see his 'Prefatory Address to King Francis I of France', Section 8 in *Institutes*.

¹⁴ A. Biéler, *Architecture in Worship: The Christian Place of Worship*, O. and D. Elliott (trans.),

as well as practical implications.

From a practical perspective, this re-positioning of the pulpit allowed as many people as possible to hear the preached Word of God, with seating in the apse, the transepts and at the front of the nave¹⁵. But, the re-arrangement was also symbolic. First, it indicated that the preached Word was central to Reformed worship. This was in particular contrast to Catholic piety, in which, arguably, the Eucharist was the central focus of worship¹⁶. The Reformers were making a symbolic statement about their priorities in worship. Some might argue that they had purely practical ends in mind, but it is difficult not to read their actions symbolically: they were ineluctably operating in a semantic field¹⁷. And for this reason the work of the Reformers has something in common with that of the artist. As Jérôme Cottin and Claude Lévi-Strauss argue, works of visual art may be considered as sets of symbols pointing beyond themselves, which nevertheless to some extent share in the reality of what they represent¹⁸. Further, some commentators suggest that the artist re-arranges the reality that he or she depicts in order to highlight what is important and requires the viewer's attention¹⁹. Similarly, I suggest that those involved in re-ordering St. Pierre re-arranged reality in order to highlight what was important, namely the Word of

(London: Oliver and Boyd, 1965), pp. 57-60.

¹⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶ It should be noted though that even before the Reformation, in the late Middle Ages some churches were being built with the increasing popularity of preaching in mind. See: Richard Kieckhefer, *Theology in Stone: Church Architecture from Byzantium to Berkeley* (Oxford: OUP, 2004), p. 46.

¹⁷ This coincidence of the practical and symbolic occurs again in the use of clear windows notable either for their size or number in later Calvinist architecture, a point I expand upon below. See, for example: H. Guicharnaud, 'An Introduction to the Architecture of Protestant Temples Constructed in France before the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes' in: P. Corby Finney (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 133-55, at p. 138, and G. Babelotzsky, *Bilder und Gedankengänge* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GmbH, 1977), pp. 166-7 and 191-4.

¹⁸ Cottin, *op. cit.*, p. 18, and Charbonnier, *op. cit.*, pp. 128 and 133.

¹⁹ For example, E. John Walford, *op. cit.*, pp. 20 and 28.

God preached from the pulpit²⁰.

Secondly, the re-arrangement of the internal appointments of St. Pierre was symbolic as it marked a shift in the understanding of space in church buildings. Before the Reformation, the priests in St. Pierre celebrated the Eucharist in the choir, around the high altar and were separated from the congregation by the rood screen. It was believed that this area of the church was a special place where God was held to be present²¹. Taking her lead from T. F. Torrance, Catherine Randall argues that this belief was consonant with a 'receptacle' theory of space. According to this, 'space is either in or about something or something is known to be in space'²². By removing the rood screen and placing the centre of worship in the space previously occupied by the high altar, it could be argued that the Reformers at St. Pierre were rejecting this understanding of space and moving to a new understanding, one which Randall, again taking her lead from Torrance, calls a 'relational' theory of space. This, she tells us, breaks the bond between the physical and the metaphysical and allows for the conception of separate spaces which interrelate with each other²³. In *Space, Time and Incarnation*, Torrance reminds us of Origen's distinction between 'earthly place' and 'heavenly place' and this seems to be how, for Randall, Calvin and the

²⁰ As well as re-arranging seating around the pulpit, some communities have also used decoration to focus attention on it. See: James F. White, 'From Protestant to Catholic Plain Style', in: P. Corby Finney (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 457-77, at pp. 460-6.

²¹ Biéler, *op. cit.*, p. 58.

²² Randall, *op. cit.*, p. 26. See also: T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Incarnation* (Oxford: OUP, 1969), pp. 10 ff., and T. F. Torrance, *Space, Time and Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 186. Randall suggests that this theory of space informed not only the internal arrangement of Catholic churches, but also the doctrine of transubstantiation.

²³ Randall, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-7.

Reformers understood church space in relation to God²⁴. However, a close reading of *Institutes* tells us that Calvin himself realized things were more complicated than Randall would have us believe. In *Institutes* IV, i, 5, Calvin, as much the classical scholar as the theologian, recounts a story concerning Xerxes as told by Cicero²⁵. Calvin takes the Persian leader to task for burning Greek temples on the premise that the gods would in no way be confined by their walls and roofs. He argues that his own, Christian, God surely has the power to come down and be near to his people, particularly in a church, in order to lift them to his heavenly glory. What is particularly important about this understanding of God in relation to space is that it does not limit his freedom²⁶. For Calvin, God can be in heaven, yet also amongst his people. Such a position rejects the notions of both a totally transcendent God, and also that of a predominantly immanent one, which for Calvin would compromise his otherness²⁷.

²⁴ Torrance (1969), *op. cit.*, p. 13.

²⁵ Cicero, *Laws*, II, x, 26.

²⁶ The question of God's freedom was also central to the debate concerning images in the Eastern Church in the eighth and ninth centuries. See, for example: Brown (1999), *op. cit.*, pp. 332-3.

²⁷ Calvin's understanding of God's relationship to his people in churches may surprise some and it should be noted that it differs from the understanding of some later Calvinists. David Brown, referring to Gretchen Buggeln's essay on the first Congregational Church of Hartford, Connecticut, suggests that the dedication sermon for this church in 1818 reveals a more sacramental understanding of place than the earlier Calvinist notion of 'meeting house', when the preacher, Rev. Strong, says that there is 'sanctity in the place where God [chooses to] reveal himself'. I argue that this later understanding of God's relationship to his church is not dissimilar to Calvin's own understanding. See: Brown (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 288, and G. T. Buggeln, 'Elegance and Sensibility in the Calvinist Tradition: The First Congregational Church of Hartford, Connecticut', in: P. Corby Finney (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 429-53, esp. p. 447. A good example of the early Calvinist position to which Professor Brown alludes is that of Constantijn Huygens, the seventeenth-century Dutch poet and statesman, who was a staunch Calvinist. Huygens writes, 'We do not praise any more the God of those simple people, who ascribe some holiness to walls or pillars'. See: C. A. van Swigchem et al., *Een Huis voor het Woord: het protestantse kerkinterieur in Nederland tot 1900* (The Hague: Staatsuitgeverij, 1984), p. 81. (My translation). Finally, it is often argued that for Calvin God is above all transcendent, totally other. There are certainly passages in his work to support this view (see: F. Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, pp. 151-2). However, I would suggest that Calvin goes to such lengths to affirm God's transcendence because he feels the need to counter the immanentist view of God

This has important consequences for the use of works of visual art. I suggest that one of Calvin's concerns about religious images, which, unfortunately, he allowed to colour his view of all works of visual art²⁸, was that worshippers might think in terms of an immanent God and thus one that is somehow 'in' the image. For Calvin, this might lead them to believe that they could somehow limit and control God²⁹. By contrast, the idea of a totally transcendent God could lead us to consider that once God had created the world, he was no longer actively involved in it³⁰. For Calvin, God is actively involved in his creation and I argue that it is exactly those two types of painting that accord most closely with Calvin's parameters for visual art, histories and landscapes, which reflect such an understanding of God³¹. In histories, particularly those depicting scenes from Scripture, but also those referring to the history of the church, we can see allusions to God's activity amongst his people. In landscapes, particularly many of those painted in the Netherlands in the seventeenth century, we see God as creator, and also as providential, actively looking after his people, as in, for example, Jacob van Ruisdael's *Het Korenveld*, which I discuss in Chapter Seven³².

The re-ordering of other churches for Reformed worship

So, we have found several arguments for the use of works of visual art arising from the

which was prevalent in the late medieval church. The final paragraph of *Institutes* IV, i, 5 and passages on God's Providence elsewhere in *Institutes* show that Calvin's view of God's relationship to the created order was far more nuanced than appears to be the case in the first instance.

²⁸ This is particularly the case in his discussion of *images* in *Institutes* I, xi, 13.

²⁹ Green, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

³⁰ For an account of the classical influences on Calvin in his understanding of God's relation to the created order, see: Schreiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 16 ff.

³¹ John Calvin, *Institution de la Religion Chrestienne, Livre Premier, op. cit.*, p. 135 (paragraph I, xi, 12).

³² See also Chapter One.

symbolic dimensions of the re-ordering of church space. However, so far, we have only looked at what happened in one church, St. Pierre in Geneva, which is closely associated with Calvin himself. I will now broaden this discussion, looking firstly at the re-ordering of church space, which necessarily concerns churches which already existed at the time of the Reformation, and then at the internal arrangement of churches built after the Reformation specifically for Reformed worship.

As Richard Kieckhefer suggests in a discussion on Protestant worship space, the greatest ingenuity of early Reformers was often devoted to the re-conception of medieval longitudinal space³³. So, let us look at two examples, one in Scotland, the other in the Netherlands, to see how space was re-conceived and the extent to which the changes after the Reformation in these churches mirrored or differed from those which were carried out in St. Pierre, Geneva.

St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh³⁴

The first church I want to look at is St. Giles', Edinburgh. This church is intimately associated with the Reformer John Knox. He spent time in Geneva with Calvin and his fellow Reformers, before returning to his native Scotland in 1559³⁵. He preached his first sermon in the church on 29th June of that year, and although the Catholics regained control of St. Giles' for a short while thereafter, by May 1560 Knox had returned to Edinburgh

³³ Kieckhefer, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

³⁴ Although the church is sometimes referred to as a cathedral, this is somewhat of a misnomer. After the Reformation, bishops only had their seat in the church during the seventeenth century. Nowadays, the church is sometimes referred to as the 'High Kirk', although this was originally only the name for the east end of the church. I shall refer to it henceforth as St. Giles'. See: John McIlwain (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13 and 26-27.

³⁵ John T. McNeill, *The History and Character of Calvinism* (New York: OUP, 1954), pp. 294-6.

and what was termed the 'reparrelling of the kirk' had begun in earnest³⁶.

Today, the focus of worship is the crossing, otherwise known as the sanctuary. There, we find a movable table for the Lord's Supper and by the pre-1350 pillar on the north east side of the crossing, there is a late nineteenth-century pulpit³⁷. Seating, including fixed pews, fans out on each side of the crossing. However, the internal appointments of the church have undergone many changes between Knox's days and our own. As one might expect, the focus of worship before the Reformation was the east end. Here the high altar was situated, and behind this the altar of St. Dionysius³⁸. In addition, there were several other altars and chapels³⁹. When the Reformers took control of the church in 1560, all the altars were removed, as was the rood loft. The walls were whitewashed and seats were placed throughout the church for the use of the congregation⁴⁰. A few years later 'lofts' or galleries were added to increase the number of seats, and, presumably, to increase the number of worshippers who could hear the sermon. However, one of the most interesting developments in the church's history was that in 1577, the parish of Edinburgh was divided into four quarters⁴¹. Three of the new parishes worshipped in the church and walls were built within the existing structure to create separate worship spaces

³⁶ J. Lees Cameron, *St. Giles', Edinburgh: church, college, and cathedral, from the earliest times to the present day* (Edinburgh: W. & R. Chambers, 1889), pp. 108 and 118.

³⁷ I visited St. Giles' on Thursday, 20th January 2005. See also McIlwain (ed.), *op. cit.*, inside cover, and p. 19.

³⁸ I assume that this refers to Dionysius the Areopagite although this is not clear from the plan that Lees Cameron provides. See Lees Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 100.

³⁹ Lees Cameron, *op. cit.*, p. 100. Although the plan of the church before the Reformation which Cameron reproduces on p. 100 does not indicate a pulpit, it is likely that there was one, as on p. 108 Cameron tells us that 'on 29th June 1559, ... [Knox] entered the pulpit of St. Giles, and ... preached from it for the first time'. Further research on this matter may yield some interesting results.

⁴⁰ Lees Cameron, *op. cit.*, pp. 118-9.

⁴¹ McIlwain (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 11.

for each congregation⁴². It is perhaps indicative of the Reformers' understanding of space that parts of the church were also given over to civic use. For example, there was a meeting hall for the General Assembly and a police office, and space was even found for storage of the burgh's guillotine, known as 'The Maiden'⁴³. That said, it seems that the special significance of the east end was not entirely eroded by the Reformation. This space, which in pre-Reformation times had been the chancel, became the High Kirk and it was here that the town council worshipped. So, although in theory the Reformation had done away with the distinction between the chancel as 'sacred space' and the rest of the church as somehow less sacred, I would suggest this distinction crept back in by the appropriation of the space by those who considered themselves to be more important than other worshippers.

This division of the church lasted until the late-nineteenth century, when under the influence of William Chambers, the building was re-unified⁴⁴. The pulpit at the east end was removed and was replaced by the new stone pulpit next to the crossing, but it was not until the 1980s that the Lord's Table was brought into the crossing, where it is situated today⁴⁵.

⁴² Lees Cameron, *op. cit.*, plan between pp. 262-3.

⁴³ For details regarding the General Assembly, see: McIlwain (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 16. For the police office, see: Lees Cameron, *op. cit.*, plan between pp. 262-3, and for the burgh's guillotine, see McIlwain (ed.), p. 11.

⁴⁴ McIlwain (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁴⁵ Lees Cameron, *op. cit.*, pp. 266-7. Note: Cameron writes that the new pulpit was placed on the south east side of the church nearest the east window. It is currently situated on the north east side of the crossing, so either it has been moved since it was first built, or Cameron is incorrect. One further possibility is that the pulpit by the crossing today is different from the one Cameron describes. However, this is less likely as today there is no pulpit at the east end of the church. Regarding the positioning of the Lord's Table, see McIlwain (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

One final point of interest is the side chapel in the North aisle. The Lord's Supper is regularly celebrated here and the chapel is decorated with a modern reredos with a nativity scene. Clearly, this use of the chapel is not equivalent to the use of chapels dedicated to saints before the Reformation⁴⁶. However, it is an interesting departure from having just one focal point for worship, the pulpit, as is usually the case in Reformed churches.

St.-Bavo Kerk, Haarlem

This then provides us with an overview of the changes that have taken place to the internal appointments of St. Giles' in Edinburgh. Now I turn to another famous church in another country much influenced by Calvin and Calvinism, to see if we can detect similar trends there. Although the civic authorities in Haarlem, Netherlands, first allowed the Calvinists to use the St.-Bavo, or Grote, Kerk for worship in 1572, it was not until 1578 that they began to worship there without interruption until the present day⁴⁷. There are four changes to the inside of the church that I want to discuss. First, in addition to the high altar, there were thirty-three other altars in the church before the Reformation. These altars were presumably dedicated to particular saints and would have been seen by the Reformers as a distinctive mark of Catholic piety. So, after the Reformation they were all removed⁴⁸. Secondly, in contrast to what happened in St. Pierre, Geneva, the position of the pulpit has not changed from before the Reformation: the pulpit built in 1678 stands on

⁴⁶ The chapel is referred to as the 'Chambers aisle' in the plan of St. Giles' in: McIlwain (ed.), *op. cit.*, inside cover.

⁴⁷ C. A. van Swigchem, 'Kerkborden en Kolomschilderingen in de St.-Bavo te Haarlem 1580-1585', in: *Bulletin van het Rijksmuseum*, 35/2, (1987), pp. 211-223 at p. 212. For a very detailed account of the changes to St.-Bavokerk, Haarlem since the Reformation, see: Mia Mochizuki, *The Reformation of Devotional Art and the Great Church in Haarlem* (Ph. D dissertation) (Yale University Press, 2001).

⁴⁸ van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

the south side of the nave, four columns in from the west end, and thus occupies the same position as the 1510 pulpit it replaced⁴⁹. However, a couple of changes were made to the pulpit which illustrate the change in emphasis of Calvinist piety from that of the Roman Catholics. On the top of the baldachin there had been a small figure of St. Bavo. This was replaced by a small vase. In addition, a sounding board was added beneath the baldachin which had the phrase 'God's word lives for ever' inscribed on it. Otherwise, the pulpit remained unchanged until it was replaced in 1678⁵⁰.

However, perhaps most importantly it is clear that the pulpit, and from it the preached Word, had become the focus of worship in the church. An etching by Jan van de Velde after a drawing by Piet Saenredam shows a large number of worshippers around the pulpit from which the minister is speaking. There is even a low wall around the worshippers, symbolically dividing them from the rest of the church, as they listen to the preacher⁵¹.

The third point that I want to discuss is closely linked to the second. As a result of the focus on the preached Word in Reformed worship, the importance of the choir was inevitably reduced. Before the Reformation, St.-Bavo Kerk had a High Choir, where the high altar was situated beneath a baldachin, and a Low Choir. Both were separated from the nave by a rood screen. After the Reformation, the walls around the Low Choir were removed and the High Choir became less important, for although the Lord's Supper was

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ van Swigchem (1987), *op. cit.*, p. 223, n. 8. I discuss the decoration of this pulpit in more detail in Chapter Five.

⁵¹ van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 4.

celebrated there, this only occurred a few times a year⁵². It is interesting to note, though, that this is not the end of the story. For, the Lord's Supper is now celebrated in St.-Bavo at a moveable table under the pulpit. This is in contrast to the practice of another place of Reformed worship, the Oude Kerk, Amsterdam, where the congregation hears the preached word from the pulpit in the nave before moving to the former choir for its weekly celebration of the Lord's Supper⁵³.

My fourth and final point relating to St.-Bavo concerns the positioning and appearance of the various organs it has housed during its history. Before the Reformation, it had three organs, one inside the Low Choir and the other two on the North and South walls adjacent to the Low Choir⁵⁴. As C. A. van Swigchem notes in a general discussion on the positioning of organs before the Reformation, this was largely for practical reasons, as singing took place predominantly in the choir⁵⁵. In the first years after the Reformation, Reformed worship forbade the use of musical accompaniment in singing⁵⁶, so although the congregation gathered around the pulpit now sang psalms, there was no need to move the organs to support them. This practice was gradually revised in the seventeenth century and, reflecting this, in 1668 the organ on the south wall was moved westward along the same wall, to stand almost directly behind the pulpit⁵⁷. However, in 1738, Christiaan

⁵² van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5 and 32.

⁵³ Both of these last two comments are based on my personal experience of visiting each of these churches for Sunday morning worship on more than one occasion during August and September 2004.

⁵⁴ van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, p. 245.

⁵⁶ This is well illustrated by the case of Jan Sweelinck, the organist at the Oude Kerk, Amsterdam at the turn of the seventeenth century, that I discuss in a little more detail in Chapter Three.

⁵⁷ Marti and Polman, *op. cit.*, p. 80. Here, it is suggested that organs began to be used in Reformed worship in the Netherlands in about 1630. I discuss this matter in a little more detail in Chapter Three.

Müller built the magnificent organ that still stands today at the west end of the church⁵⁸. This huge organ affirms the place of singing in Reformed worship, situated as it is, close to the congregation. But, it is also used for secular concerts, a fact which reminds us that like the rest of the furnishings in the church, it is the property of the civic authorities, rather than of the Reformed congregation. This coincidence of church and town is neatly reflected in the symbolic figures on top of the organ. On the central pipes stand two lions rampant, holding the coat of arms of Haarlem. To the right of the lions, one level below is the figure of King David holding a harp. Here, David symbolizes music and also the art of sacred poetry and these come together in the singing of psalms, accompanied by the organ, a practice which became increasingly widespread in Reformed worship during the eighteenth century⁵⁹.

This then provides us with an overview of the changes to the internal arrangements of two more churches influenced to a greater or lesser degree by the ideas of John Calvin. So let us now look briefly at how this discussion can inform the debate about the use of works of visual art in Reformed churches.

First, it affirms what we learnt in looking at the changes to St. Pierre, Geneva, that the focus of Reformed worship is the preached Word. Changes to the internal arrangements of these churches have both practical value, in helping as many people as possible to hear the preached Word, and a symbolic dimension, as they affirm the importance of the Word. This reminds us that the Reformers and their successors have been operating in a semantic

⁵⁸ van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 32. See also <http://www.grotekerk.nl> (accessed January 25th, 2005). I describe this in more detail in Chapter Five.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 246-7.

field, replete with symbols which contain meaning, but also point beyond themselves to other realities. And this, I argue, is how we should consider works of visual art.

Secondly, this discussion reminds us of the changes over time which have occurred in Reformed worship. As I note in Chapter Three, Calvin did recognize that practices in the church may, by necessity, need to be modified over time⁶⁰. We have seen how changes in the attitude to musical accompaniment in singing has led to the relocation of organs in St.-Bavo, Haarlem and we also noted differences in the location and frequency of the celebration of the Lord's Supper in various churches. Here, though, we should perhaps sound a note of warning. The use of the former choir in the Oude Kerk, Amsterdam for the celebration of the Lord's Supper is a reminder that the tendency in us to ascribe sacredness to particular things and places can persist, however much we may try to counteract it. Such a tendency may, arguably, also have led to the use of the east end of St. Giles' by the town council after the division of the church, and, I suggest, it may lead some to ascribe sacredness not only to religious images, but to works of visual art in general⁶¹. This fact should not deflect us from affirming the use of works of visual art, but it does remind us that we should always attend to the potential risks associated with our use of them. Finally, we have noted some of the artistry in Reformed churches, such as that found on organs and pulpits, but also, more unexpectedly, in a side altar in St. Giles'. I develop this theme more fully in the next chapter. However, it is worth noting that for

⁶⁰ *Institutes* IV, x, 30.

⁶¹ I discuss the relationship between religious images and works of visual art more fully in Chapter One. The most important point to note here is that the distinction between religious images and works of visual art depends to an extent on the attitude of the viewer.

this and the other reasons I have discussed, we can further affirm the use of works of visual art in churches.

Churches built after the Reformation for Reformed worship

So far I have discussed churches which were built before the Reformation. Now I turn to those built after the Reformation to see whether we can detect similar trends in their internal arrangements and also whether the forms of these buildings provide us with further arguments in support of my overall thesis.

Several commentators note the wide variety of designs amongst these new churches. Both Hélène Guicharnaud and Raymond Mentzer Jr. discuss at length the different forms of the churches built for Reformed worship during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in France and they see this variety as a testimony to the dynamic creativity within the Reformed tradition⁶². Likewise, although some Calvinist communities in the Netherlands often worshipped in existing church space, others built new churches which differed widely in appearance⁶³. That said, most of the new churches could be classified as one of several architectural types. For example, in France the churches were either basilican or longitudinal, or based on a centralized plan⁶⁴. In the Netherlands, we see similar groupings. Those churches based on a centralized plan often had the form of a geometric

⁶² Guicharnaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 183-4, and Raymond A. Mentzer Jr., 'The Reformed Churches of France and the Visual Arts', in: P. Corby Finney (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 199-230, at pp. 228-9. See also André Biéler, *op. cit.*, pp. 62-3.

⁶³ W. Kuyper, *Dutch Classicist Architecture: A Survey of Dutch Architecture, Gardens and Anglo-Dutch Architectural Relations from 1625 to 1700* (Leiden: Delft University Press, 1980), p. 7, and van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9.

⁶⁴ Guicharnaud, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

shape, such as an octagon or a circle, whilst others were in the form of a Greek cross⁶⁵.

These geometric shapes also formed the basis of new churches in Scotland⁶⁶.

Commentators seem agreed that the inspiration for these designs was classical architecture, which the architects of the Reformed churches studied either directly from ancient sources or via architects of the Italian Renaissance such as Sebastiano Serlio (1475-1554) and Leon Battista Alberti (1404-1472) who both appropriated and documented classical forms.

Serlio's *Quinto libro d'architettura* had been translated into French by the mid 1500s and this provided the impetus for buildings based on both basilican and centralized plans in France⁶⁷. In the Netherlands, Hendrick de Keyser's masterpiece, the Westerkerk in Amsterdam is a combination of the ideas of the Roman basilica and the Greek cross and it is clear that de Keyser owes his inspiration here to the Renaissance architect, Alberti⁶⁸.

Classicism in the Netherlands finds, perhaps, its fullest expression in the work of Jacob van Campen, in particular in the Nieuwe Kerk, Haarlem, whose plan is a square in which a Greek cross is inscribed⁶⁹. Van Campen seems to have been influenced by Vincenzo Scamozzi, a pupil of Andrea Palladio, and here the ubiquitous figure of Constantijn

⁶⁵ W. Kuyper, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁶⁶ James F. White, *Protestant Worship and Church Architecture: Theological and Historical Considerations* (New York: OUP, 1964), pp. 93-4.

⁶⁷ Guicharnaud, *op. cit.*, p. 151. Rosalys Coope tells us that the second temple at Charenton, built in 1623, was based on Vitruvius' description of a basilica. However, it is not clear whether the architect, Salomon de Brosse, took this directly from an edition of a book by Vitruvius, or whether he took it from a Renaissance book on classical architecture. See: Rosalys Coope, 'De Brosse, Salomon' in: Adolf K. Placzek et al. (ed.), *Macmillan Encyclopaedia of Architects* (New York: The Free Press, 1982), pp. 523-6, at p. 526.

⁶⁸ van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 20 and 85.

⁶⁹ W. Kuyper, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-19.

Huygens may have been the conduit⁷⁰.

This appropriation and use of classical architecture is particularly interesting as it is largely an architecture of immanence⁷¹. As such, it is a world-affirming style and focuses much less on the pain of the cross than on the restoration of cosmic harmony that Christ's resurrection has made possible⁷². As such, David Brown argues that the classical style was 'ideally suited to act as a complement in Protestantism', although as I will discuss shortly, he says this is so provided that the immanence is balanced by a certain transcendence⁷³. But, the inherent immanence of the classical style was not the only reason for its popularity amongst Reformed congregations and architects.

For example, in France, the Edict of Nantes stipulated that Protestant *temples* must not be confused with Catholic churches⁷⁴. This demanded a different style of architecture from what had gone before, particularly the Gothic style, and it was during the sixteenth century that the new, classical style was being developed in Italy. In *Quinto libro d'architettura*, Serlio notes that the style allows for quick construction and reduced costs due to the simplicity of the building plan⁷⁵. Although there were clearly exceptions to this, many of the new churches were noted for their simplicity and for both the reasons given by Serlio, churches built in the classical style would commend themselves to Reformed

⁷⁰ Christine Flon et al. (eds.), *The World Atlas of Architecture* (London: Mitchell Beazley Publishers, 1984), pp. 300-1. See also: W. Kuyper, *op. cit.*, p. 21 for the Palladian influence on Dutch Classical architecture.

⁷¹ Brown (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 289.

⁷² *ibid.*, pp. 285-6.

⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 289.

⁷⁴ Guicharnaud, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 151-2.

communities⁷⁶.

But, perhaps the most important reason for this appropriation of classical forms was that they were the most suitable style for Reformed worship. As I have already noted in my discussion of churches which were re-ordered after the Reformation, the focus of Reformed worship was the preached Word of God⁷⁷. It was vital that as many people as possible could hear the preacher and this would be most likely in churches in the form of a circle, octagon or Greek cross. This same concern also led to the construction of galleries⁷⁸. In addition, these forms, and to a lesser extent the basilican form, allowed for a sense of community to develop amongst worshippers, as they could see each other as well as the preacher during a service. André Biéler summarizes these points well when he says, 'the ancient tradition of the circular church was rediscovered, thus expressing the gathering of the community by the Word of God around the holy table in the joy of the Resurrection'⁷⁹.

The idea of the people of God as one community is also reflected in the unity of space in the new churches, in contrast to the divisions of space in pre-Reformation church buildings⁸⁰.

⁷⁶ A good example of an exception to Serlio's principles is the *grand temple* of La Rochelle. See Guicharnaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 145-6.

⁷⁷ See also Mentzer, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

⁷⁸ Guicharnaud, *op. cit.*, pp. 148-9.

⁷⁹ Biéler, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁸⁰ Mentzer, *op. cit.*, p. 201. That said, over time divisions of space have developed in Reformed worship spaces. For example, in some churches, the pulpit cannot be accessed from the surrounding space, but only via a passage or staircase leading directly to the minister's vestry (see, for example, Christopher Stell on the Jireh Chapel in Lewes, Sussex in: Stell, 'Puritan and Nonconformist Meetinghouses in England' in: P. Corby Finney (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 49-81, at p. 80. Likewise, certainly in re-ordered churches, members of the town council often had dedicated booths at the back of the congregation, from which they

Alongside these practical and symbolic reasons for the use of classical forms in the construction of new churches, some may have been built in this style due to the preference of their patrons. One of the first churches to be built in the Netherlands after the Reformation was the Reformed church at Willemstad, which is a perfect octagon⁸¹. W. Kuyper suggests that a possible reason for the use of this shape was the interest in the use of geometric forms for churches of the *stadholder*, Prince Maurits. However, Kuyper then goes on to note that Maurits' interest in geometric forms went further than church design and he states that the layout of the *stadholder's* gardens was also influenced by these forms. They comprised polygonal pavilions 'in the middle of radiating or encircling arbours'. But, most interestingly, Kuyper suggests that these may easily be interpreted as reflections of global or heavenly constellations⁸². And here, we are reminded that geometric forms, particularly the circle, can point to the heavens, regardless of the context in which we find them. Circular churches with a pulpit at their centre, from which the Word of God is preached, are symbolic of the universe, with Christ, its Creator and sustainer, at its heart. As David Brown notes, the circle has a long history as an image for the divine and I wonder whether churches in this form, and that of other geometric shapes, can lift our attention upwards towards the heavens⁸³. And here, we come back to the central question of the extent to which classical architecture speaks of immanence and the

could keep an eye on other worshippers (see, for example, the Oude Kerk, Amsterdam, where these booths are still *in situ* (I visited the Oude Kerk regularly during August and September, 2004)).

⁸¹ White (1964), *op. cit.*, pp. 89-90.

⁸² W. Kuyper, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

⁸³ Brown (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 283.

extent to which this can be offset by a certain transcendence.

As Professor Brown notes, one commentator suggests that two of the churches in Venice designed by Palladio, *Il Redentore* and *San Giorgio Maggiore*, manage to combine both the ‘rational’ and ‘sensual’ with the ‘transcendent’⁸⁴. He also suggests that the style could be sustained by Protestantism, as long as it was balanced by the transcendence of the divine Word in Scripture⁸⁵. Over time, though, the absolute transcendence of Scripture has been brought into question, and, it is interesting to note that an increase in the use of music and changes in the style of music used in Reformed worship have both led to the restoration of the balance between immanence and transcendence⁸⁶. But, I wonder whether any of the architectural features or internal arrangements of the new churches, or indeed aspects of Reformed liturgy, also act to provide a transcendental dimension to the worshipper’s experience.

We can begin to answer this question by observing that along with the use of galleries, one thing that many of the new churches had in common was their use of large windows with clear glass⁸⁷. To give but one example, we see that Hendrik de Keyser included thirty-six large windows with clear glass in his design for the Westerkerk in Amsterdam⁸⁸. In her discussion of French temples, Hélène Guicharnaud notes that the windows in these buildings were often numerous, of substantial dimensions and mainly of clear glass.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, pp. 286-7.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p. 289.

⁸⁶ *ibid.* See also Chapter Three, where I discuss in more detail how modern worship styles, including those used in Reformed churches, provide the opportunity for worshippers to seek the transcendent.

⁸⁷ Kieckhefer, *op. cit.*, p. 49.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 50-1.

However, she does note that the occasional stained-glass window displayed the coats of arms of prominent members of the community⁸⁹. That said, she argues that these examples in no way compare to the stained-glass windows of medieval and later Catholic churches⁹⁰. The reasons for the use of clear glass were in part practical. As Guicharnaud herself notes, the second temple at Charenton was fitted with a large number of windows 'to illuminate the lower galleries'. In part, it may also have been because of the fear amongst Reformed congregations that stained-glass windows could provide an opening for the re-introduction of religious images and, potentially, idolatry: hence William Prynne's warning against stained-glass windows in the sixteenth century, 'popery may creep in at a glasse-window'⁹¹. However, I want to suggest a far more positive and symbolic reason for the use of clear glass in windows. As Gerd Babelotzky notes, Calvin often used the metaphor of light to describe God and his work in creation⁹². Further, Babelotzky suggests that Calvin specifically uses the sun to represent God and his work. We can wonder at the sheer size of the sun and also its brilliance. Some of the weight of transcendence for worshippers can be borne by the feelings of awesomeness that it can evoke and some by the light which comes through the clear windows⁹³. That said, as Babelotzky notes, despite its distance from us, the sun spreads its light over all the earth and sustains and strengthens us in our daily lives. Here, we see the closeness of the

⁸⁹ See also Chapter Five, for the use of coats of arms in the decoration of Dutch Reformed churches.

⁹⁰ Guicharnaud, *op. cit.*, p. 152. See also Christopher Stell, *op. cit.*, on the use of clear glass in English churches influenced by the Reformed tradition.

⁹¹ Philip Benedict, 'Calvinism as a Culture? Preliminary Remarks on Calvinism and the Visual Arts', in: P. Corby Finney (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 19-45, at p. 31.

⁹² Babelotzky, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-7. See also Chapter Five, where I discuss a possible reason for Calvin's use of light as a symbol for God suggested to me by Nicholas Wolterstorff.

⁹³ *ibid.*, pp. 191-4.

metaphor to Calvin's own understanding of a providential, Creator God. But of course this aspect of the metaphor also speaks of immanence, and thus prevents us from considering light, and the sun in particular, as a purely transcendental symbol⁹⁴. So, what else could share the weight of transcendence in Reformed worship?

The *sursum corda* is a central part of Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper, and in it we are exhorted to lift our hearts to God⁹⁵. However, I would suggest that in Reformed worship today, we do not feel drawn towards heaven in this act. So, although this aspect of Reformed liturgy has the potential to give a transcendent dimension to the worshipper's experience, it does not do so to the extent that Calvin in particular might have wished for.

Finally, it is worth noting that apart from the rationality inherent in classical architecture, it gains some of its immanent character from the lack of upward thrust, and indeed the downward force of its columns⁹⁶. Hélène Guicharnaud notes that visitors to French Calvinist temples nearly always commented on the lack of interior pillars. This had the practical advantage of minimizing the obstacles between the preacher and the congregation, but may also have reduced the sense of immanence felt in other classical architecture⁹⁷.

This then provides us with an overview of the main trends at work in the building of new

⁹⁴ Another symbol which balances immanence with transcendence is the soundboard above pulpits in churches built after the Reformation. To my mind, some of these, particularly the larger ones, speak of God watching providentially over the minister, and by extension, the congregation, as the Word is preached. However, they also speak of the canopy of the heavens and thus the transcendence of God. See for example the soundboard in the Nieuwe Kerk, Haarlem in: van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 178. I discuss the soundboard again in Chapter Five.

⁹⁵ *Institutes* IV, xvii, 36.

⁹⁶ Brown (2004), *op. cit.*, pp. 285 and 288.

⁹⁷ Guicharnaud, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

churches for Reformed worship, many of which were built in the classical style. I will now look at how this discussion informs my overall thesis, before moving on to the final section in the chapter, where I discuss Calvin's ontology of church.

Again, we note first that however much the Reformers may have tried to avoid doing so, they operated in a deeply symbolic and semantic field⁹⁸. The manner in which they arranged the internal appointments of their churches had symbolic meaning as well as practical purpose, and the architectural style and features they used were similarly symbolic. Likewise, works of art are symbolic. They are ontologically distinct from what they depict, but at the same time have something in common with it. So, if we accept architecture in the Reformed tradition, I suggest that we should also accept appropriate works of art. Secondly, we have seen that within Reformed worship there is an ongoing balancing act between transcendence and immanence. I suggest that our two categories of painting, histories and landscapes, provide a good reflection of this balance. They do not attempt to portray God, thus in no way compromising his transcendence, or 'otherness', but at the same time they remind us that God is actively at work in his Creation, reflecting the immanent dimension of Calvin's theology.

Thirdly, this discussion reminds us of the creativity that exists and has existed within the Reformed tradition. It is not a tradition, as some might think, that is averse to artistic endeavour. Rather, it is one that has a rich history of creativity in a variety of fields.

⁹⁸ As Gilbert Cope notes, any church building will make a theological statement. See: Gilbert Cope, 'Function and Symbolism in Church buildings', in: Gilbert Cope (ed.), *Christianity and the visual arts: studies in the art and architecture of the church* (London: Faith Press, 1964), pp. 77-88, at p. 77.

Much of this creativity, such as the poetry of Constantijn Huygens⁹⁹ and the paintings of Rembrandt and Jacob van Ruisdael, has been produced and preserved outside the confines of Reformed churches. Some of it, however, such as the architecture we have just discussed and the decoration we will look at in the next chapter, has been incorporated into the very fabric of these buildings. Likewise, I suggest that we should now look again at the question of using appropriate works of visual art in Reformed churches, and give serious consideration to the use of works such as history and landscape paintings in these places of worship.

We should also perhaps say at this point that it is important to respect the concerns of Reformed worshippers that works of visual art may distract people's attention at certain points in a service, such as during the sermon. This being so, I suggest that they can be placed behind the worshippers' line of vision, or, where buildings have them, in side chapels. They need not form part of the main act of worship in a church, but can be used to reflect and meditate on at other times¹⁰⁰.

The ontology of church

Such are the arguments for works of visual art which arise from a discussion of churches

⁹⁹ See examples of this in Chapter Seven. For further examples of Huygens' religious poetry, see: C. Huygens, *Avondmaalsgedichten en Heilige Dagen*, F. L. Zwaan (ed.) (Zwolle: W. E. J. Tjeenk Willink, 1968).

¹⁰⁰ A good recent example is in St. Nicholas' Church, Durham, where worship may be characterized as Evangelical and not dissimilar to Reformed modes of worship. The church is longitudinal, although after significant re-ordering, the lectern, from which sermons are preached, is now on a raised dais against the centre of the south wall of the church. The east end of the church is thus no longer the focus of worship and has been converted into a chapel. This is separated from the rest of the church by sliding glass doors which are open during services to increase capacity. In the chapel, two paintings have been hung which can be meditated upon, but which never stand in the line of vision between the worshippers and the preacher.

built after the Reformation. So, we have now looked at both churches built before the Reformation, whose internal appointments have been altered by Reformed communities and churches built specifically for the purpose of Reformed worship. However, in all these discussions, we have used the term 'church' to denote the buildings in which this worship takes place. I now want to reflect on whether this is the primary meaning of the word for Calvin, and, if it is not, whether he still felt it necessary for Reformed communities to meet in buildings specifically set aside for worship.

Initially, Calvin considered church to be the communion of saints, the totality of the elect. Another way of describing this is to use the term 'invisible church'. Then, under the influence of Martin Bucer, it seems that Calvin developed a more positive attitude to the 'visible church'. This development in Calvin's thought can be seen in the various editions of *Institutes*. In the 1536 edition, Calvin considers church almost exclusively as the 'invisible church'. However, by 1559, he devoted nineteen of the twenty chapters of Book IV of *Institutes* to the visible church¹⁰¹.

One important difference between the invisible and visible churches is that whereas the former contains only the elect, the latter includes both the elect and the reprobate. We can also distinguish between them in two other ways. First, the former represents the church as God sees it, whilst the latter is how the church appears to us. This contrast helps us to remember that for Calvin there is still only one church, with Jesus Christ as its head¹⁰².

Secondly, whereas the former is an object of faith, as stated in the Apostles' Creed, the

¹⁰¹ Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, pp. 294 ff.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p. 297.

latter is an object of experience. Given that the visible church is how we experience church, it is perhaps instructive to take a closer look at what Calvin wrote about church viewed from this perspective.

The first point to note is that the church is a gift from God to support the faith of his people: it has been instituted by God in order to sanctify the elect¹⁰³. Secondly, there is a profoundly eschatological dimension to the visible church. Calvin recognized that those who attend church, even the elect, are not without sin and it is the role of the visible church to make them holy until the final judgment when they, the elect, will be separated from the reprobate and the invisible church will be made known¹⁰⁴.

But, until that time, how does Calvin say that we are to distinguish between God's institution of the visible church and other institutions which may claim to be church? First, he says that the true church is where the Word of God is purely preached and heard and secondly, it is where the sacraments, which for Calvin are baptism and the Lord's Supper, are administered according to Christ's institution¹⁰⁵. Here, perhaps more than elsewhere, we come to the question of whether Reformed worship needs to take place in special buildings, particularly as it seems that for Calvin, the concept of church is closely associated with those who constitute the body of worshippers.

Taking his lead from Scripture, Calvin does seem to argue in favour of using specific

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, pp. 293 and 297-8. As Wendel notes, Calvin was well aware that it would be impossible to form a human community composed solely of the elect, such as, for example, the Anabaptists desired. This being so, although by definition the church was only for the sanctification of the elect, it also necessarily included the reprobate.

¹⁰⁴ *Institutes* IV, i, 13 and 17.

¹⁰⁵ *Institutes* IV, i, 9.

buildings for the worship of God and indeed he states quite clearly that the use of these buildings for any other purpose is a profanation of his worship¹⁰⁶. It could be argued that Calvin was in favour of dedicated buildings because he wanted church authorities to retain control over worshippers. However, a more positive reason for setting aside such buildings is that their use would help ensure that the Word was purely preached and the sacraments correctly administered. So, although church for Calvin was more about God's people than about the buildings in which worship takes place, he does seem to believe that such buildings are a necessary part of the institution of church, by which God sanctifies his people. And it is here that we find arguments for the use of appropriate works of visual art. For, I suggest that if we consider these not as a means of salvation, which may be how some viewed them in the late Middle Ages, but rather as a means for the sanctification of those who have already been saved, then they fit well with Calvin's understanding of church and should be more acceptable to those in the Reformed tradition¹⁰⁷.

But, works of visual art do not only offer us a means for sanctification. They can also help Christians to fashion their own identity. Jeremy Begbie suggests that as contemporary theology becomes more abstract, 'it may well be that [visual] art rather than

¹⁰⁶ *Institutes* IV, i, 5.

¹⁰⁷ I also suggest that history and landscape paintings can carry some of the weight of revealing God's truth. Orthodox Calvinists would of course balk at this suggestion. But, it is important to distinguish between revelation through the preached Word, which can retain its place as the means by which God offers his people salvation, and revelation by which those who are saved can be sanctified. As François Wendel notes, church for Calvin is a place for the sanctification of the saved and, as Jérôme Cottin contends, visual art can assist in this process of sanctification. See: Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, p. 298, and Cottin, *op. cit.*, pp. 309 f. I discuss how works of visual art can sanctify us, particularly by pointing to the beauty of God's actions in the world, in Chapter Two.

theology will do much to fashion Christian identity in a de-Christianized Western world¹⁰⁸. And if we look at the type of painting that was least offensive to Calvin, namely histories¹⁰⁹, then we see that they can reflect the self-understanding of a local community, and can also allow it to connect with Christian communities from other places and other times. In this way, they can reinforce a sense of unity amongst Christians which stretches far beyond the walls of the churches in which they may hang, and they can help to develop the sense of Christian identity of which Begbie speaks.

In this regard, I also suggest that landscapes, the second category that accords closely with Calvin's parameters for visual art, are a valuable reminder to worshippers that, although they meet in a building dedicated to worship, they should not consider themselves separate from the world, but rather remember that they are part of it. Further, it will remind them that the world is God's creation and that they should actively assist him in his providential care for it¹¹⁰.

There may still be those who consider that the use of works of visual art in churches is to be avoided as worshippers may give these the honour due to God. So, let us look at how we can address these concerns. First, we should not attempt to produce representations of God¹¹¹. Equally damaging is the giving of honour due to God to something else. So, even though we may have before us a representation of a person, or indeed other objects, we must not give that representation, and, by extension, the person or object represented,

¹⁰⁸ Jeremy Begbie, 'Art' in: Paul Barry Clarke and Andrew Linzey (eds.), *Dictionary of Ethics, Theology and Society* (London: Routledge, 1996), pp. 50-54, at p. 54.

¹⁰⁹ *Institutes* I, xi, 12.

¹¹⁰ See p. 125 above.

¹¹¹ *Institutes* I, xi, 12.

honour due to God¹¹². Here, Calvin's idea of the *semen religionis* ('seed of religion') is critical. He suggests that in all humanity, there is an innate sense of deity. As a result of man's corrupt nature, this leads him to give honour to objects rather than to God¹¹³. Although one may disagree with the extent to which Calvin reifies this phenomenon, it does seem that there is a tendency in humans to worship objects and, with particular regard to certain works of visual art, to confuse the signifier with the signified. So, how do we overcome this tendency?

In Chapter One, I discussed the need to manage our desires. But, there is more we can do. We need to be imaginative about where we place works of art. We can place them behind worshippers, so that they are not in the line of vision between the congregation and the minister. I have already mentioned the use of chapels attached to churches, but there may be other spaces, such as refectories and entrances to churches where art can be placed¹¹⁴. It should be remembered that portraits of past ministers are often hung in the vestries of Reformed churches and I would suggest that if it is acceptable to hang pictures there, it is surely acceptable to hang them in other rooms in churches which are not used for the main acts of worship¹¹⁵.

Another way of mitigating the risk of idolatry is to change the position of individual pictures on a regular basis. I suggest that idolatry is more likely to occur if an object

¹¹² John Calvin, 'Catechism of the Church of Geneva', in: *Tracts and Treatises on the Reformation of the Church by John Calvin, Vol. II, op. cit.*, p. 58.

¹¹³ *Institutes* I, iii, 1. See also: Eire, *op. cit.*, pp. 200 ff., and Chapter One.

¹¹⁴ See n. 100 above.

¹¹⁵ A good example of this is the former vestry in the Oude Kerk, Amsterdam, which has been preserved in its nineteenth century state and can be viewed from its doorway by visitors to the church.

remains in the same place for a long period. If we rotate works of art between locations within a church, or display particular ones for a fixed period only, we again reduce the potential for idolatry that some may fear¹¹⁶.

Let us not forget that works of visual art may be considered as sets of symbols pointing beyond themselves, and by thinking in this way, we avoid confusing what we see with what is represented¹¹⁷. We may be helped in this regard by thinking that rather than being an exact re-production of a reality, works of visual art can take us one step back. They highlight the essential features of that reality, but suppress others¹¹⁸. Another way of saying this is that works of visual art allude to a given reality, or as E. John Walford puts it, they participate in 'selective naturalness'¹¹⁹. This understanding of works of visual art has two important consequences. Firstly, it reminds us that what we see is not the thing itself, but a depiction of it, where the artist has picked out the salient aspects of the thing. Secondly, it makes us less likely to fall into the error of thinking that an object in a picture is in any way a representation of God. For example, if we saw a painting of a lion in a church, we would not think that it was the artist's attempt to tell us what God looks like. Rather, if we chose to read it in such a way, we would see it as a metaphorical allusion to certain aspects of what we consider to be God's character, such as strength and alertness¹²⁰. And our cause will be helped further by remembering that our knowledge of

¹¹⁶ The Methodist Church Collection of Modern Christian Art is used by churches on this basis.

¹¹⁷ Cottin, *op. cit.*, p. 18, and Charbonnier, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

¹¹⁸ Green, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-4.

¹¹⁹ See n. 19 above.

¹²⁰ David Brown discusses the multivalency of the symbol of the lion in Christianity in: 'Symbolism', in: *OCCT*, *op. cit.*, pp. 690-2, at p. 692.

God is provisional and that it should both be tested against what we have already learnt about God, or more precisely his actions in the world, and be open to future correction¹²¹. Finally, let us not forget that we live in a highly visual world¹²². In part, what we see forms our self-identity. We need to have works of visual art in churches to help us both individually and collectively develop and sustain a Christian self-identity in the face of the multitude of visual stimuli informed by non-Christian paradigms that we may encounter outside churches. Rather than an iconoclastic *via negativa*, we need to develop a hermeneutic of the visual that can help us discern between those stimuli that are appropriate, such as history and landscape paintings, and those which are not, and promote the former as a means by which we can develop a distinctively Christian identity in the modern world.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion, it may be seen that by examining churches used for Reformed worship built both before and after the Reformation, and by considering what 'church' means for Calvin, we can develop further arguments for the use of works of visual art in places of worship informed by the Reformed tradition. In this discussion, I have looked closely at several aspects of Calvin's theology. Not only have I affirmed the centrality of the preached Word and the right administration of the sacraments, but I have also brought some clarity to his understanding of God's relationship to his people and his creation. In this regard, I suggest that far from undermining these important aspects of Reformed

¹²¹ See Chapter Three where I discuss Calvin Seerveld's three tests which can help us to assess whether something new that we learn can take us nearer to or further away from the truth.

¹²² Schuringa, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

worship and thought, works of visual art, in particular paintings of landscapes and histories, can both affirm God's creation and providence, and provide a further means by which his people can shape their self-understanding and be sanctified.

In the next chapter, I move from looking at the architecture and internal appointments of churches in the Reformed tradition to considering the decoration that we find in some of these churches, in features such as their windows, organs and pulpits. Here, we will discover that the notion that Reformed churches are bare, colourless places of worship is now often misplaced. Further, we will see that the range of decoration, including, in a few cases, paintings, means that the distance we must travel to gain acceptance for a broader use of appropriate works of visual art in these churches is that much less.

Chapter Five: Art and Identity: How we can argue for the introduction of history and landscape paintings into Reformed churches by considering decoration and works of art already in them

Introduction

In the last chapter, we looked at how the architectural features and arrangement of the internal appointments in Reformed churches provide us with arguments for the use of history and landscape paintings in these places of worship. We also saw how Calvin's understanding of church, whereby he sees it not only as the people of God, but also as a building for the sanctification of the elect, affords us further support for our overall thesis. During the course of this discussion, we looked at examples from a range of countries where Reformed communities have existed over time, including England, France, the United States, Scotland and the Netherlands. In this chapter, I want to take the last of these, the Netherlands, and look in more detail at the decoration of some of the most important features to be found in churches in the Reformed tradition there.

Since the 1570s¹, Reformed communities have played a central role in the religious life of the Netherlands, and there is no doubt that the ideas of John Calvin have had an important influence on how they have conducted themselves and what they have believed². The predominant Reformed Church in the Netherlands has for the most part been the

¹ For an account of the rise of Reformed communities in the Netherlands, see: Andrew Pettegree, *Emden and the Dutch Revolt: Exile and the Development of Reformed Protestantism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), and Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall 1477-1806* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 169 ff.

² For Calvin's influence on the Reformed movement in the Netherlands, see: Karel Blei, *De Nederlandse hervormde kerk: Haar Geschiedenis en Identiteit* (Kampen: Uitgeverij Kok, 2000), pp. 23-4 and pp. 185-6.

Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk (NHK) ('Dutch Reformed Church')³. This is a broad church, and as we shall see, includes those who would be happy to be called 'liberal'⁴, as well as those who may be considered orthodox and others of a more conservative persuasion. At the end of the nineteenth century, under the guiding hand of the pastor and statesman, Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), a new church movement, the *Gereformeerde Kerken in Nederland* (GKN) ('Reformed Churches in the Netherlands') was created by former members of the NHK. This attempted to bring a certain simplicity and sobriety to Reformed worship, which it was felt had been lacking in the NHK up to this point⁵. And here, it is interesting to note that despite this call for sobriety, Kuyper himself, in one of his famous Stone lectures, argued that Calvin was much more well-disposed towards the visual arts than has generally been acknowledged⁶.

Despite this split, however, there have been moves to bring the NHK and GKN closer together in recent years and these have culminated in the formation in 2004⁷ of the *Protestantse Kerk in Nederland* (PKN) ('Protestant Church in the Netherlands'), which is a union not only of these two churches, but also of the *Evangelisch-Lutherse Kerk in het Koninkrijk der Nederland* ('The Protestant-Lutheran Church in the Kingdom of the

³ Blei, *op. cit.*. For the earlier history of this church, see: Israel, *op. cit.*, pp. 367 ff., and to give the reader an idea of its extent today, see: *Jaarboek / Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk 2003-2004* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 2003). The name NHK has been used for this church since 1816. Before this it was called the *Nederduits(ch) Gereformeerde Kerk*. See: http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nederlandse_Hervormde_Kerk.

⁴ See n. 28 below.

⁵ James D. Bratt, 'Abraham Kuyper: His World and Work' in: James D. Bratt (ed.), *Abraham Kuyper: A Centennial Reader* (Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1998), pp. 1-18, at pp. 10-11.

⁶ Heslam, *op. cit.*, pp. 196 ff.

⁷ The official date of the union was 1st May, 2004. See: http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nederlandse_Hervormde_Kerk.

Netherlands')⁸.

In this chapter, I want to look at the interiors of five churches, whose communities were, up to 2004, part of the NHK. Here, we will see, as we did in the last chapter, that despite what many may think about the internal appearance of Reformed churches, some of them exhibit a considerable amount of decoration. There will of course be some who argue that the case of the Netherlands is atypical⁹. They might point to the fact that other streams of thought influenced the Reformed tradition in that country, such as those which led to the 'Remonstrance' of the Arminians to the States of Holland in 1610¹⁰. They may also argue, along with Svetlana Alpers, that the culture of the Netherlands in the seventeenth century was a highly visual one¹¹, and conclude that Reformed communities were unable to prevent this from being reflected in the internal appointments of their church buildings. However, in response I would say first of all that it is sometimes in those churches whose communities are most conservative and where the association with the thought of John

⁸ As this is a very recent union, it is advisable to visit the PKN website, <http://www.pkn.nl>, for further information. It is interesting to note that as with other matters in the history of the Reformed Church, this union has by no means been straightforward. Some of the communities from the NHK did not want to join the PKN and have now formed another group of churches called the *Hersteld Hervormde Kerk* ('Reconstituted Reformed Church'). For further information on this group, visit: http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hersteld_Hervormde_Kerk.

⁹ Given the broadness of the Reformed tradition, I am not convinced that there is such a thing as a 'typical' church interior in this tradition. Daniel Hardy and Egbert Haverkamp-Begemann are amongst those who note the diversity of the Reformed tradition in general. See: P. Corby Finney (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 423-5.

¹⁰ Israel, *op. cit.*, p. 425. See also: Benjamin J. Kaplan, *Calvinists and Libertines: Confession and Community in Utrecht 1578-1620* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

¹¹ Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Pelican Books, 1989), p. xxv. One estimate puts the number of paintings produced in the Netherlands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries at comfortably in excess of one million. See: Ad van der Woude, 'The Volume and Value of Paintings in Holland at the Time of the Dutch Republic', in: David Freedberg and Jan de Vries (eds.), *Art in History/History in Art: Studies in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Culture* (Santa Monica CA: The Getty Center for the History of Art and the Humanities, 1991), pp. 285-330, at p. 288.

Calvin is strongest that we find the most significant amount of decoration¹². Secondly, I would argue that there are examples of decoration in Reformed churches in other countries¹³. I have chosen one country, the Netherlands, partly for the sake of space, but also because it helps to set the scene for a discussion of the works of art of two Dutch artists, Rembrandt and Jacob van Ruisdael, in the next two chapters. However, I suggest that further work may usefully be carried out in comparing what I discuss here about NHK churches with those in the Reformed tradition in other countries. Thirdly, as we shall see, although Alpers' view has much to commend it, I would argue that modern Dutch culture is no more inherently visual than is that of, say, Scotland, or the United States. But, despite this, much of the decoration in Reformed churches in the Netherlands that I look at in this chapter was created in the twentieth century.

So, with these thoughts in mind, let us now begin our survey of churches in the NHK. We start by considering what features these churches share in common. This is by no means a straightforward task, for as Karel Blei notes in a history of the NHK, 'The average Reformed [church] does not exist'¹⁴. But, as he goes on to say, churches in this tradition do share a number of beliefs and practices, which give them a common identity and help to distinguish them from churches in other traditions. So, let us see what these are.

¹² We will see this when we compare the conservative Noorderkerk and Jeruzalemkerk with the liberal Westerkerk, all of which are in Amsterdam.

¹³ See: P. Corby Finney (1999), *op. cit.*, for examples from a wide range of countries. Interestingly, this survey does not include Scotland. But, as we have seen in Chapter Four, we have a good example of decoration in a Reformed church in St. Giles' Cathedral, Edinburgh. See: John McIlwain (ed.), *op. cit.*. For further examples of decoration in Scottish churches in the Reformed tradition, see: J. Gifford et al., *Edinburgh 1560-1843* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1984), and G. Hay, *The Architecture of Scottish Post-Reformation Churches 1560-1843* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1957).

¹⁴ Blei, *op. cit.*, p. 185. (My translation).

The first feature that these churches share in common is that they affirm that their members should trust in Christ, be his own and live for him¹⁵. This is not, of course, something unique to the Reformed tradition. However, we begin to see it take its own distinctive shape when we discuss a further three features that its churches have in common.

The first of these is that they assert the centrality and authority of the Bible as the 'Word of God'¹⁶. In particular, there is an emphasis on the mediation of God's Word through the sermon¹⁷. The second is that for the members of NHK churches, as with other churches in the Reformed tradition, the notion of covenant is very important. God made a covenant with his people, Israel, in the Old Testament. However, this was not merely a covenant at one time with one people, but rather pointed to God's promise for all his people from generation to generation. As will become clear, a central feature of the Reformed community's self-understanding has been the belief that this promise was made for its members in particular¹⁸. The third distinctive feature of the Reformed tradition is the adherence to particular statements of faith and definitions of belief, developed after the Reformation. For the NHK, which we will concentrate our attention on in this chapter, the Dutch Confession of Faith (1561) and the Canons of Dort (1619) are important creedal statements, although the foremost exposition of its specific set of beliefs is the

¹⁵ These propositions are in fact contained in the response to the first question in the Heidelberg Catechism ('What is your only consolation, in life as in death?' (my translation)). Blei argues that everything else in the Catechism, one of the three most important documents of the NHK, flows from this. See Blei, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-7.

¹⁶ As François Wendel notes, John Calvin also equated the Bible with the Word of God. See: Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, p. 159.

¹⁷ Blei, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-200.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 206-7.

Heidelberg Catechism (1563)¹⁹.

In this catechism as in others in the Reformed tradition, such as Calvin's Geneva Catechism (1545)²⁰, particular attention is given to the Ten Commandments, which, of course, were central to God's covenant with Israel. As Blei notes, in the Heidelberg Catechism there is a clear attempt to give a comprehensive explanation of each of the Ten Commandments. He supports his case by looking in detail at what it says about the second and fourth commandments. For our purposes, it is interesting to reflect on his analysis of the questions and answers in the catechism concerning the second commandment, which in the Reformed tradition begins with Exodus 20: 4²¹.

Here, there are two points which merit our attention. First, the Catechism states that the second commandment does not forbid all works of visual art. Rather, it forbids both the making of images to represent God and the giving of honour due to God to these or any other works of art²². Secondly, it says that pictures which have decorated the walls of churches in certain periods, often referred to as 'the books of the unlearned'²³, as they have been used to educate the illiterate, should not be allowed for in church-buildings, as

¹⁹ For the Heidelberg Catechism, see: Klaas Zwanepol (intro.), *op. cit.*, pp. 73-103. For an English translation of this Catechism, together with a commentary on it, see: Karl Barth, *The Heidelberg Catechism for Today*, S. C. Guthrie (trans.) (Richmond, Virginia: John Knox Press, 1964).

²⁰ I refer here to the Latin edition of the Geneva Catechism, which was published in 1545. This was a translation with a few amendments of the French edition of the Catechism, published in 1541. For an English translation of the Geneva Catechism, see: John Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, J. K. S. Reid (trans. and ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 83-139.

²¹ Blei, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-3. In the Reformation, the practice of treating Exodus 20: 4 as the beginning of the second commandment seems likely to have started with Leo Jud and was subsequently adopted by John Calvin from the first edition of *Institutes* onwards. See: Stirm, *op. cit.*, p. 238.

²² I discuss what I see as the distinction between religious images and other works of visual art in Chapter One. The most important point to remember in this regard is that the distinction to some extent depends on the attitude of the viewer.

²³ Dutch: *boeken voor de leken*. Calvin discusses and then dismisses these in *Institutes* I, xi, 5.

God can only be mediated through the living proclamation of his Word²⁴. However, despite these injunctions, particularly the second one, it would be wrong to think of Reformed churches as bare, white and devoid of decoration throughout their history²⁵. Indeed, in Reformed churches in the Netherlands and elsewhere much decoration and art can be seen today²⁶. What is perhaps more interesting is that much of this art bespeaks the aspects of identity and self-understanding described above.

A significant part of this identity, of course, derives from the Reformed community's understanding of its relationship with God and much of the art in its churches reflects this relationship. However, it also reflects God's relationship to the whole of his Creation and it is worth noting that the types of painting which I am advocating in my overall thesis, i.e. histories and landscapes, both reflect something of these relationships. Whereas the former allude to man's relationship with God throughout the ages, the latter bespeak his relationship with the created order in general, which of course includes man. Finally, what is perhaps most interesting and surprising, is that we already find some of these paintings in exactly the type of conservative church in the Reformed tradition where we might least expect to find them. This, of course, makes it that much easier to argue for a more positive attitude to the introduction of other paintings into Reformed churches.

The churches chosen for this study

So, let us begin to look at specific examples of visual art in churches to see how questions of identity and the relationship between God and the communities which worship him in

²⁴ Zwanepol, *op. cit.*, p. 96. See also: Blei, *op. cit.*, pp. 192-3, and my Chapter One, n. 41.

²⁵ van Swigchem et al. (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 85.

²⁶ See n.-13 above.

these churches are represented in this art. For the sake of simplicity, I will draw examples from five NHK churches, which cover a broad range of belief, outlook and practice within the Reformed tradition, yet share, to a greater or lesser degree, the common features of Reformed churches described above²⁷. The first of these is the Westerkerk, Amsterdam (built 1621-31), whose worshipping community may be described as 'liberal'²⁸. The next two churches are both used by the Reformed community in Haarlem. In the summer, they use the grand St.-Bavokerk in the centre of the town, which is the only one of the five churches in this selection built before the Reformation. In the winter, they use the Nieuwe Kerk (1645-9), designed by Jacob van Campen²⁹. Here, it will be interesting to compare and contrast the interior decoration of churches used by the same community, which may

²⁷ As I say in the following note (n. 28), one of the churches in this study, the Westerkerk, Amsterdam, is seen as 'liberal' and it may be a matter of debate as to the extent to which this church adheres to each of these common principles discussed above. It is a member of the NHK and its liturgy, which includes a sermon, has much in common with that of more orthodox Reformed churches. However, on central questions such as the extent to which authorities other than Scripture may be referred to, the situation is less clear. For the Westerkerk community's membership of the NHK, see: *Jaarboek / Nederlandse Hervormde Kerk 2003-2004*, op. cit., pp. 253-4, and a pamphlet: J. Kamps-van Drunen et al., *Ontmoeting met de Westerkerk* (Kerkenraad van de Westerkerkgemeente), p. 1.

²⁸ The Dutch word used to describe the Westerkerk and other similar churches is *vrijzinnig*. In an email response to me (dated 19th May, 2005), a member of the Westerkerk community, Margriet Tichelaar, confirmed that this was an appropriate description for the church. I thank her for this information. E. G. Hoekstra and M. H. Ipenburg give a good summary of the beliefs of this and similar churches in the NHK when they say, 'the *vrijzinnige* in general want a broader church, where there is room for all groupings that present themselves as Christian. In addition, they want to situate themselves and operate within contemporary culture'. (My translation). (See: E. G. Hoekstra and M. H. Ipenburg, *Wegwijs in gelovig Nederland: Een alfabetische beschrijving van Nederlandse kerken en religieuze groepen* (Kampen: Kok, 1987), p. 137). A dictionary translation of this word is 'liberal' (see *Kramers Dictionaries, English-Dutch/Dutch-English Dictionary, Vol. II, Dutch-English*, J. A. Jockin-La Bastide et al. (eds.) (Amsterdam: Elsevier Boeken B.V., 1987), p. 662), and although this may not exactly match the meaning of the word as it is used to describe other churches, in particular some in the Anglican Church, it seems to come fairly close to it. It is particularly useful in that it at least distinguishes such churches from other, more orthodox and conservative churches in the Reformed tradition.

²⁹ The reason for the seasonal change is purely practical. It is much easier and cheaper to heat the smaller Nieuwe Kerk in winter than St.-Bavokerk.

be seen as Orthodox Reformed³⁰. The other two churches, both of which are in Amsterdam, are used by communities which may be considered conservative. The first of these, the Noorderkerk, belongs to an informal grouping of conservative churches within the NHK known as *de gereformeerde bond binnen de hervormde kerk*³¹. The second is the Jeruzalemkerk, (built 1924-29), which, although it does not belong to this *bond* ('union'), shares several fundamental principles with it. These include a strong affirmation of the authority of scripture, holding the Bible to be the Word of God and making the preaching of an extensive sermon on the Word the central focus of its services³². It is in these churches that we find perhaps the most surprising representations of self-understanding and identity through decoration and art.

Windows and light

So, let us begin our examination of the decoration in these churches by looking at a feature which is often associated with places of worship in the Reformed tradition, namely clear glass windows. Here, we will see straight away that any attempt to associate one particular artistic feature with one stream in the Reformed tradition is likely to fail.

Of the five churches under discussion, two have windows which contain only clear glass.

³⁰ The Dutch appellation for this type of community is *middenorthodox*. The fact that this description fits the convictions and outlook of the Reformed community in Haarlem has been confirmed to me in an email from one of the pastors, Bernard Luttikhuis, dated 18th May, 2005. I thank ds. Luttikhuis for his help in this matter. For a discussion of the different streams within the NHK, see: E. G. Hoekstra and M. H. Ipenburg, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

³¹ This phrase is not easy to translate into English as both *gereformeerde* and *hervormde* can be translated as 'reformed'. A possible translation is 'the (conservative) Reformed union within the (broader) (Dutch) Reformed Church'. For more information on this group, visit: http://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gereformeerde_Bond_binnen_de_Hervormde_Kerk.

³² These details were communicated to me in an email response (dated 23rd May, 2005) from ds. Chris van Andel. I thank ds. van Andel for this information.

One of these is the conservative Noorderkerk, Amsterdam, first used for Reformed worship in 1623³³. I suggest that one reason this church was built with clear glass windows was to indicate to those around it that it was not a Catholic church. Admittedly, there were few if any openly Catholic churches in Amsterdam at this time³⁴. However, it would have been important for the new Reformed churches to communicate that they were a different type of church from what had gone before, and the use of clear glass windows would be one way of doing this. Another reason for the use of clear glass may have been the importance given to light as a symbol in the Reformed tradition. As Gerd Babelotzky notes, light, particularly sunlight, is a very important symbol for God in the writings of John Calvin³⁵. His understanding of the symbolic function of light was kept alive in the Reformed tradition, particularly through the use of clear windows in churches. This allowed worshippers to remember that they were in God's presence, and also, I suggest, reminded them that they were to continue Christ's work as lights of the world. Here then, we begin to see that even the barest of decoration can reflect the self-understanding of Reformed churches as well as their relationship to God.

The other of these five churches which has clear glass windows is the 'liberal' Westerkerk,

³³ M. D. Ozinga, 'De ontwerper(s) van de Noorderkerk' in: Richard Vervoorn (ed.), *Noorderkerk Amsterdam, bouw, interieur, orgel, restauratie, functie* (Amsterdam: Stichting Vrienden van de Noorderkerk, 1992), pp. 5-13, at p. 5.

³⁴ In the *Alteratie* ('Alteration') of 1578, Catholic worship in Amsterdam was officially suppressed. Restrictions to Catholic worship continued into the early seventeenth century, giving rise to the use of *schuilkerken* (concealed churches). This said, Catholics still formed an important minority in Amsterdam in the first half of the seventeenth century. See: W. Kuyper, *op. cit.*, pp. 41-2, and Israel, *op. cit.*, p. 380.

³⁵ Babelotzky, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-7 and 191-4. In addition, in an email to me dated 21st February, 2005, Nicholas Wolterstorff suggested one possible reason for Calvin's use of light as a symbol for God. He said that a Reformation historian at Yale University, Lee Wandel, suggested that what was probably going on was that Calvin felt that light was the only adequate symbol for God, since it is uncircumscribed. As Professor Wolterstorff comments, this is a fascinating suggestion and deserves further study. I thank Professor Wolterstorff for this information.

which lies a mile or so to the south of the Noorderkerk in central Amsterdam. However, as C. A. van Swigchem notes, this use of clear glass may have more to do with the architectural precepts on which the church was built than with the need to define the building as a non-Catholic place of worship. He suggests that the architect of the Westerkerk, Hendrik de Keyser, based his design on the classical style developed by Italian architects during the Renaissance, in particular Leon Battista Alberti. For Alberti, the ideal style for a church was a bright, white, uniform building which spoke of proportion and harmony³⁶. As we learnt in Chapter Two, these are two of the qualities central to one understanding of the beauty that points towards God described by Calvin in *Institutes*³⁷. So, here again we see a reminder of the Reformed tradition's understanding of God, or more properly, of God's actions in the world, in the decoration of its churches³⁸.

The other three churches in our selection contain windows whose glass is predominantly coloured. Let us look at each of these in turn to see if we can detect similar themes at work.

The first of these is the Nieuwe Kerk, Haarlem. The layout of this church is a square in which a Greek cross is inscribed³⁹. Above the door in the east arm of the cross is a

³⁶ van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 20-1 and 84-5.

³⁷ *Institutes* I, v, 1. See also Chapter Two for a fuller discussion of Calvin's account of the beauty in the world and the universe which points to God.

³⁸ I should also say that the clearness of the windows in the Noorderkerk maintains the harmony and proportion of this church, which is in the form of a Greek Cross. However, in this case, particularly since the church has historically been conservative, I feel that they have more value in affirming that it is not a Catholic church, than is the case for the Westerkerk.

³⁹ W. Kuyper, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-19.

stained-glass window depicting the baptism of Christ, created by Jaap Pronk in 1936⁴⁰. This is of particular interest as Calvin himself was opposed to depictions of Christ in visual art, saying that they could only represent half of him as they could not capture his divinity⁴¹. In the next chapter, I discuss how we might address Calvin's concerns in this regard, and suggest that one way of allowing for depictions of Christ would be to consider that they *allude* to his divinity, rather than try to capture it in material form. However, in this case, opposition to the depiction of Christ may not be as strong as one might expect, as it is in a stained-glass window, and this has historically been amongst the forms of visual art deemed least offensive to Calvinists⁴². The subject of the window, the baptism of Christ, also merits our attention, as it reminds us of another feature of Reformed identity discussed by Karel Blei: taking seriously the administration of the sacraments, which for the Reformed community are both baptism and the Lord's Supper. In addition, of course, it recalls the significance of baptism for our relationship with Christ, a theme amply covered elsewhere⁴³.

However, apart from this window, the rest of the windows in the Nieuwe Kerk consist of rectangles of glass, either pale blue or purple, or clear. One might wonder given Reformed sensibilities why all the glass is not clear. One possibility is that it may be to prevent people in houses overlooking the church from being able to see directly into it.

⁴⁰ Carine Hoogveld et al. (eds.), *Glas in lood in Nederland 1817-1968* (The Hague: SDU uitgeverij, 1989), p. 311.

⁴¹ See Chapter One.

⁴² Benedict (1999), *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁴³ Blei, *op. cit.*, p. 189. For a description of Calvin's understanding of the importance of baptism and further bibliographical references on this subject, see: Wendel (1963), *op. cit.*, pp. 318-29.

However, more importantly, we do know that these windows have not always had this appearance. The Nieuwe Kerk was a favourite subject for the renowned painter of Dutch Reformed church interiors, Pieter Saenredam, a fact no doubt influenced by his friendship with its architect, van Campen⁴⁴. In a painting of the interior of the church in 1652 (plate 7)⁴⁵, Saenredam depicts several windows containing various coats of arms. Our attention, though, is drawn to the central window in the picture, which is the east window. At this time, the window depicted an eagle bearing the coat of arms of the town of Haarlem, a theme repeated on the ceiling directly above this window. There is clearly a close association here between the worshipping community and the town in which it worships. Further, I suggest, there is an element of civic pride at work here. However, this is not without reference to God. For, as we learn from other sources, the inhabitants of Haarlem believed that they had a special place in God's plan for his creation. For example, the Mennonite teacher Jan van Westerhoven, in his work *Den Schepper Verheerlijckt in de schepselen* ('The Creator glorified in [his] creatures') writes of the town, 'O well-blessed Haarlem! O second Canaan...' ⁴⁶.

This sense of Haarlem's special place in God's providential work was made even more

⁴⁴ For Saenredam's friendship with van Campen, see: Bob Haak, *The Golden Age: Dutch Painters of the Seventeenth Century*, Elizabeth Willems-Treeman (trans. and ed.) (New York: Stewart, Tabori and Chang, 1996), p. 250.

⁴⁵ See also: *Catalogue Raisonné of the works by Pieter Jansz. Saenredam* (Utrecht: Centraal Museum, 1961), pp. 114-5.

⁴⁶ *Den Schepper Verheerlijckt in de schepselen, ofte choor-gesang, Aller geschapene dingen, daer in den Mensch de Bovensangh heeft. Voor-gesteld in 7. Samenspraken, onder Somersche Wandelingen. Dienende wijders tot lof van Haerlems Vermaeckelijcke Landsdouwen. Doorgaens met toepasselijke Veersen en Gezangen gemenght, en na 't leven af-gebeelde Konst-platen verciert.* Jan van Westerhoven, Junior. Tot Haerlem gedrukt by Jan Gerritsz. Geldorp Boek-verkoper in de groote Houtstraat 1685, p. 372 (my translation). See also: Huigen Leeftang, 'De Natuur van Jacob van Ruisdael', in: Martina Sitt, Pieter Biesboer et al. (eds.), *Jacob van Ruisdael : de revolutie van het Hollandse landschap* (Haarlem: Waanders, 2002), pp. 21-27, at p. 27, n. 15.

explicit in a window in the other church in Haarlem that we are considering in this study, the St.-Bavokerk. This was the window that dominated the west end of the church, until it was removed to make way for the great Müller organ in about 1735, and it is to this that we now turn⁴⁷.

The window in question was a gift to the church from the bishop of Utrecht, Georgius van Egmond, in 1541. Indeed on the left of the window, the bishop himself was depicted holding a crozier. On the right, there was originally a depiction of the Holy Trinity in the form of the *Gnadenstuhl* ('Seat of Mercy')⁴⁸. It seems that the Reformed community which began to worship in St.-Bavokerk from 1578 took exception to this motive⁴⁹ and the depiction of the bishop, and had these panes replaced by others depicting an important moment in Haarlem's history, which has taken on legendary significance⁵⁰. The story goes that during the Crusades, citizens from Haarlem captured the Egyptian town of Damiate from Muslim control. As a token of their gratitude for this, the patriarch of Jerusalem gave the town the right to add a cross to its coat of arms and the Emperor Frederick I (Barbarossa) likewise allowed them to add a sword. This occurred in a ceremony known as the *Wapenvermeerdering* ('Addition to the Arms') and it is this ceremony that was depicted in these new panes⁵¹. Despite the various accretions to this story over time, it obviously resonated with the self-understanding of the people of Haarlem and gave them a

⁴⁷ P. J. H. Cuypers and C. J. Gonnet, *De St. Bavokerk te Haarlem* (Haarlem: H. D. Tjeenk Willink, 1894), pp. 19-20.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 18. For a discussion on the origin and meaning of this term, see: David Brown, 'The Trinity in Art', *op. cit.*, pp. 342-3.

⁴⁹ See also Chapters One and Six.

⁵⁰ Cuypers and Gonnet, *op. cit.*, p. 19.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

sense of civic pride as well as affirming their special place in God's relationship with his people⁵².

St.-Bavokerk contains many other stained-glass windows and in this sense is no different from other churches in the NHK, particularly those built before the Reformation⁵³. Two more which catch the eye are positioned behind the main pulpit, in the south aisle. On the right of the pulpit is a window containing coats of arms, this time those of the Rhine polders and cities (1691). On the left is a much more recent window depicting Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden by Gunhild Kristensen (1957). This window is sometimes called *de Scheppingsraam* ('the window of Creation') and here again we see a work of art depicting God's interaction with the world⁵⁴. Indeed, the Creation is also the theme in a highly original set of windows in the Jeruzalemkerk, Amsterdam, which we will now consider.

This church was built in the style of the Amsterdam School and covers an area which approximates to a square. In contrast to what we find in more traditional churches, the pulpit is on the north side of the building facing south. One of the characteristic features of the architecture of the Amsterdam School is symmetrical design and the Jeruzalemkerk is no exception to this⁵⁵. On the east side of the church there is a series of seven windows

⁵² Information for this section comes primarily from an exhibition in the Frans Halsmuseum, Haarlem. Certain websites describe this episode in Haarlem's history, for example <http://www.haarlemshuffle.com>. Simon Schama describes the battle of Damiate in *The Embarrassment of Riches*, although in contrast to other sources, he places it in Syria, not Egypt. See: Simon Schama, *The Embarrassment of Riches, An Interpretation of Dutch Culture in the Golden Age* (London: Fontana Press, 1991), p. 73.

⁵³ van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 288-91.

⁵⁴ Pamphlet: *De Grote of St.-Bavokerk Haarlem* (Kerkvoogdij Hervormde Gemeente Haarlem), p. 5. To see pictures of this and other windows in the church, visit <http://www.bavo.nl>.

⁵⁵ Marjanne Blonk, 'Architectuur en symboliek' in: M. Blonk, Dik van Andel en Cees de Soet (eds.), 75

depicting each of the seven days of Creation as recounted in Genesis 1. Exact copies of these windows run in the opposite direction along the west wall of the church, thus maintaining the symmetry of the building. The windows for the first two days are non-figurative and consist of interlocking pieces of glass which are predominantly purple and orange. These colours, which also appear on other features of the church's internal decoration, allude to the fact that God is present in his faithfulness and glory⁵⁶. The other five windows are progressively more figurative until on the window for the seventh day, we see Adam and Eve looking out over God's creation in the Garden of Eden⁵⁷. As with the Creation window in St.-Bavokerk, Haarlem, these windows remind worshippers that God created the world and all the creatures in it and also that they are to act as stewards of this world.

At this point, it is interesting to reflect on the choice of name for the church – Jerusalem – and ask whether this alludes to the city of Jerusalem on earth, or the new heavenly Jerusalem, which Christians believe will be their final home. The creation windows themselves act as portals, or points of connection, with the surrounding environment, which is a town square surrounded by blocks of flats, in the suburb of Baarsjes in West Amsterdam. This connection is further emphasized by the fact that to the north, the church is built onto the adjacent flats⁵⁸. This reminds worshippers and local inhabitants

Jaar Jeruzalemkerk - Hervormde wijkgemeente in Amsterdam-West 1929-2004 (Amsterdam: Jeruzalemkerk, 2004), pp. 25-31, at p. 25.

⁵⁶ Again, we see how art can allude to a reality beyond itself. This is a theme I develop more fully in Chapter Six.

⁵⁷ Blonk, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-9.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p. 25.

that one of the church's main tasks is to reach out to the local community in missionary work⁵⁹. These elements suggest a more earthbound orientation for the church than a heavenly one. However, a representation in one of the windows sets us off on a journey which takes us to the heavenly Jerusalem.

In the window for the sixth day, we see several creatures depicted, including not only a lion and an elephant, but also a snake. It was of course the snake that led to Adam and Eve's expulsion from the Garden of Eden and we are reminded of their, and our, exclusion from paradise by the depiction of the angel holding the flaming sword (Genesis 3: 24) in the central window on the south wall of the church. However, through the redeeming work of Christ, we are not excluded from paradise, or heaven, forever. To remind us of this, a cross emitting rays of light is depicted above the angel. The work of the cross, of course, creates the possibility of joining earth to heaven once more and indeed in an adjacent window, we see the heavenly Jerusalem depicted with twelve gates (Rev. 21: 12). In another window, we see a lamb⁶⁰. This alludes to the two verses in the Book of the Revelation of St. John the Divine in which the lamb, along with the Lord God, is described as the temple of the heavenly Jerusalem, and, again with the Lord God, as its light (Rev. 21: 22, 23). But before the faithful become too comfortable and merely wait for the day on which they go to heaven, they should reflect on the candles above the lamb, which

⁵⁹ Ds. Chris van Andel, 'Impressies' in: M. Blonk et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 6-9, at p. 8. The motto of the church is '*groeien in geloof, gemeenschap en getal*', which means 'to grow in faith, fellowship and number'.

⁶⁰ It is interesting to note that, despite the much greater use of visual media that we associate with it than with Calvinism, the Eastern Orthodox Church does not allow for depictions of Christ as the lamb. See: Brown (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 48, n. 41.

remind them that they are to spread the light of God's Word until Christ comes again⁶¹.

The fact that the church faces south also allows for the use of the symbol of light in the church. This heralds the rising of God's Word in the world that may be seen by the church as a world of darkness⁶². So, we see that the Jeruzalemkerk in a sense stands on earth, in heaven and also in a place between the two and perhaps reminds worshippers to be in the world but not of it⁶³.

One final piece of symbolism in other windows in the Jeruzalemkerk worth mentioning is to be found in the stairwells leading up to the gallery. Here, we see stained-glass windows depicting the sacrificial offerings brought into the front courtyard of the temple. This, of course, reminds us of the Reformed community's identification with the Old Testament and Israel. This connection is further emphasized by the flowers at the ends of the banisters on the staircases, which remind us of the blossoming of Aaron's rod⁶⁴.

That we find such dense symbolism in a conservative Reformed church is perhaps surprising, but no less valuable for that. By contrast with the windows, another feature of the church, its organ, has a relatively sober design, but despite this, its makers clearly recognized that they were operating in a semantic field.

The decoration of organs

As already mentioned, one of the characteristic features of the Amsterdam School, in

⁶¹ Blonk, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-9. In a further example of symbolism, each of the four main electric lights in the central hall consists of a large lamp surround by twelve smaller lamps. See: Blonk, p. 31.

⁶² *ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶³ John 15: 19 and John 17: 16.

⁶⁴ M. Blonk et al., *op. cit.*, p. 31. See: Numbers 17.

which style the Jeruzalemkerk was built, is symmetry⁶⁵. A view from the pulpit shows that the organ pipes are positioned symmetrically on either side of the main window in the south wall. This symmetry is, incidentally, also present in the pulpit and the positioning and design of the artificial lighting of the church⁶⁶.

Like the organ in the Jeruzalemkerk, the main organ in the Noorderkerk, Amsterdam, is also attractive, but similarly not decorated to any great extent. That said, in a report on the consecration service of the organ in 1846, it was described as *een sieraad van [de] kerk* ('a decoration of the church')⁶⁷. And indeed, as well as having an appearance which is pleasing to the eye, the front of the organ includes two cherubim supporting the pipes and a harp surrounded by a wreath at the top in the centre, which alludes to David and in particular to the singing of Psalms, a important feature in the worship of this church⁶⁸.

However, perhaps the most important feature of this organ is its positioning. As was the case for the designers of the Jeruzalemkerk, when those responsible for the introduction of the organ in the Noorderkerk in the mid-1800s were considering where it should be placed, they were keen to avoid interfering with the architectural unity of the church. Each arm of the Greek cross is joined to the adjacent arms by a bevelled wall. Each of these walls is supported by a column. In order to preserve the architectural unity of the church, it was necessary to build the organ around one of these columns, and in fact it was

⁶⁵ See p. 166 above.

⁶⁶ To see pictures of the organ pipes and of the windows described above, visit <http://www.jeruzalemkerk.nl>.

⁶⁷ Arie van Duijn, 'Het orgel in de Noorderkerk' in: Richard Vervoorn (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 40-46, at pp. 40-42.

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p. 41. For a picture of the organ, visit <http://www.noorderkerk.org>.

built on the northwest facing bevelled wall, opposite the pulpit. Hence the face of the organ is curved, both to accommodate the column and to ensure that it did not break the unity of space.

So, we see that symmetry and unity of space are important considerations in the design and use of Reformed churches. This, of course, does not merely provide a pleasant sight, but reminds us of qualities which, according to Reformed thought, point towards God. If we are to place works of visual art in such churches, it will be necessary to take account of these concerns when considering where exactly they should be situated.

Let us now turn to the principal organs in the other three churches in our study to see whether these themes are repeated. The first of these that I want to discuss is the main organ in the Westerkerk, Amsterdam. As with the two organs I have just considered, the question of unity is also important in relation to this organ. Although the organ is by far the most ornate and eye-catching feature of the church, steps have clearly been taken to avoid as far as possible breaking its architectural unity, which, as discussed above, is a central feature of Hendrik de Keyser's design⁶⁹. This has been achieved firstly by the symmetrical arrangement of the organ pipes, secondly by the central positioning of the organ on the west wall and thirdly by the use of classical orders of columns to support the organ. These echo the design of the columns which support the arches in the main body

⁶⁹ To see a picture of the organ, visit <http://www.westerkerk.nl>. For a discussion of the principles on which de Keyser based his design for the church, see p. 162 above. Despite the fact that the organ does not break the architectural unity of the church interior, C. A. van Swigchem is right to suggest that its presence does affect how one experiences the interior of the church. See: van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 77.

of the church and also the use of the column motive on features such as the pulpit⁷⁰. That said, the sense of unity is challenged both by the organ wings and the allegorical figures on the organ. Although each of these features preserves the symmetry of the organ in number, the fact that they depict a variety of subjects cannot but disturb an otherwise harmonious view. So, let us look in detail at each of the features in turn to see what they tell us about the church and what it believes.

We begin with the organ wings. The first point to note is that the organ consists of two sets of pipes, the larger set resting on Corinthian columns above the smaller set, and that both sets have a pair of wings. Both of these pairs of wings are open, but it is those on the upper set of pipes which particularly merit our attention. Each of these wings depicts a scene from the Old Testament, again affirming the Reformed Church's identification with Israel⁷¹. Looking westwards, on the left wing we see David dancing and playing in front of the ark of the covenant. On the right, we see the Queen of Sheba bringing gifts to King Solomon⁷². These are of course paintings, although not framed and hung on a wall as we have come to expect from our experience of seeing paintings in art galleries. So, here we have a first hint that far from being completely excluded from Reformed churches, paintings can be found in these buildings. Of additional interest is the fact that these two pictures fall neatly into the category of history painting, which was the type of painting most favoured by Calvin⁷³.

⁷⁰ J. Kamps-van Drunen et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 6 and 10.

⁷¹ The wings were painted by the artist Gerard de Lairese (1640-1711).

⁷² J. Kamps-van Drunen et al., *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁷³ *Institutes* I, xi, 12.

Let us now turn to the allegorical figures on the Westerkerk organ to see what more they can tell us about the church's self-understanding. On the top of the main pipe case, there stands a female allegorical figure, and on a level below her, on each side, stand two more female allegorical figures. Together they represent Faith, Hope and Love as described in I Corinthians 13⁷⁴. Allegorical figures are, it is true, not at all uncommon in Reformed churches, although it seems that members of these churches in earlier times were much more comfortable with them than their modern day descendants⁷⁵. The figure at the top, in the centre, is Love. She is depicted with children, alluding to earthly love, a theme echoed by a cornucopia and shell containing many fruits. Love towards God is represented by the flaming heart that the woman holds in her left hand⁷⁶. Underneath the woman is the inscription *deo et proximo* ('[Love] for God and one's neighbour')⁷⁷. On the left, as we look westwards, is the figure of Faith, holding a book and a goose feather. These bespeak the authority of Scripture. Further, the figure of Faith stands on a block, alluding to the fact that Faith is the unshakeable foundation of all virtues⁷⁸. The third figure, on the right, is Hope. She is looking heavenwards and holds an anchor, an age-old symbol of hope⁷⁹. There are other allegorical figures on the organ. However, I want to conclude my account of the organ by looking at the clock which stands directly above it. The clock itself is bordered by two classical columns. Beneath it is a skull. Through the

⁷⁴ J. Kamps-van Drunen et al., *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁷⁵ van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 135.

⁷⁶ J. Kamps-van Drunen et al., *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p. 18. See also van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 135.

eye-sockets, ears of corn are growing. Here, we see a symbol of life growing out of death, a theme central to Christianity⁸⁰. Above the clock, we see three white crosses in a vertical line on a black vertical stripe surrounded by a red oval. This is the coat of arms of Amsterdam and can be found elsewhere in the church, for example on the ornate chandeliers. As we found in our discussion of the windows in the Haarlem churches, close association with the surrounding location is an important aspect of self-understanding in the Reformed tradition and in this respect Amsterdam is no different from Haarlem. Indeed, if we turn back to the churches in Haarlem and look at their organs, we will see that they too are decorated on top with their town's coats of arms.

If we look at the organ in the Nieuwe Kerk first, we see a well-decorated organ situated in the west-facing arm of the Greek cross⁸¹. One of its most prominent features is the use of festoons to decorate it. These motives, which can also be seen on the church's pulpit, again bespeak the Reformed community's close identification with Israel. Festoons or garlands were a form of ancient temple decoration, and indeed in II Chronicles 4: 12, 13 we are told that they were used to decorate Solomon's temple itself. Christianity has appropriated these as decorative motives and given them the particular meaning of both piety and belief in the resurrection: the triumph of life over death⁸².

As with the organs already mentioned, the question of the extent to which the instrument in the Nieuwe Kerk, Haarlem interferes with the architectural unity of van Campen's

⁸⁰ J. Kamps-van Drunen et al., *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁸¹ This organ was in fact brought over from St.-Bavokerk in 1791, where it had been situated in the south aisle. See: van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, pp. 32 and 246-7.

⁸² *ibid.*, p. 83.

design is also worth considering. The fact that the organ is built into an alcove reduces the risk of this, although the worshipper's experience of space in the church is doubtless altered by its presence⁸³. This reminds us again of the need to consider how the introduction of paintings into a church such as this would affect the sense of spatial unity that worshippers may currently feel.

Issues of spatial unity are less pressing in relation to the final organ that we will look at, namely the magnificent Müller organ in the Nieuwe Kerk's sister church, St.-Bavokerk, Haarlem. This is largely because, in contrast to the other churches under discussion here, it was built before the Reformation, and has subsequently been re-ordered for use by the Reformed community. As mentioned above, this organ is situated at the west end of the church and replaced the large stained-glass window, originally donated to the church by Georgius van Egmond⁸⁴. It contains over five thousand pipes and rises to some thirty metres above the ground, almost touching the ceiling of the church⁸⁵. At the top, we see the arms of Haarlem held by two lions rampant and capped with a crown. Looking westwards, on the left we see the figure of David holding a lyre. This alludes both to music, as the organ became the main instrument for the accompaniment of singing in Reformed churches, and to sacred poetry, as David is the author of many of the Psalms, which still today form an important part of Reformed worship⁸⁶. Although there are other figures decorating the organ which also allude to music, one in particular is worthy of

⁸³ *ibid.*, p. 77.

⁸⁴ See p. 165 above.

⁸⁵ Pamphlet: *De Grote of St.-Bavokerk Haarlem*, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁸⁶ See Chapter Three for the role of psalmody and also of the organ in Reformed worship.

note, given common assumptions about the sensibilities of the Reformed tradition. About half way down the organ on the right as we look at it, we see a female allegorical figure that is bare-breasted. Admittedly, this figure is quite high up, but given the position of the organ in relation to the pulpit, it would still be in the line of vision of many worshippers during a service. So, here again, we see our common understanding of the decoration in Reformed churches being challenged. This is also the case when we turn to look at the focal point of Reformed worship, the pulpit, as we will now see.

The Decoration of Pulpits

There is little doubt that the pulpit is the definitive symbol for the preached Word of God and thus has particular significance in Reformed worship. We see that it is often decorated with symbols itself in order both to emphasize this fact and to illustrate important lessons that can be learnt from God's Word⁸⁷. So, let us begin by looking in detail at one of the most ornate pulpits in the NHK, that of St.-Bavokerk, Haarlem, to see how this is achieved.

One of the most striking features of this pulpit is the fact that the *kuip* or 'bowl' in which the preacher stands, does not touch the ground. Rather, it seems to be carried on the wings of an eagle, flanked by several putti. Of course, the bowl is attached to the column behind it, but, together with the soaring crown above the sound board, the overall effect is to remind us that the Word comes from heaven, rather than merely being the product of

⁸⁷ van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 173. See also: James F. White (1999), *op. cit.*, pp. 460-6. White discusses Puritan meetinghouses in North America, and we learn from him that the pulpit is usually the most decorated feature in these places of worship, in order to draw attention to it and to underline its significance as the place from which the Word is preached.

human design. The eagle is, of course, commonly associated with St. John the Evangelist, but it is also a symbol that points to other realities which equally merit our attention. For example, because in the past it was believed that the eagle could fly higher than other birds and was the only creature capable of gazing at the heat of the sun, parallels were drawn between it and Christ. This relationship is strengthened with the idea that the eagle first protects its young with its wings and later, when it teaches them to fly, carries them up on its wings. This recalls the death on the cross by which Christ protects mankind. Two further allusions, which remind us again of the Reformed Church's close identification with Israel, come from the Books of Exodus and Isaiah. In Exodus 19: 4, 5, just before Moses gives Israel the Ten Commandments, God reminds him that it was he who defeated Egypt and carried Israel up on the wings of eagles and brought his people to himself⁸⁸. In Isaiah 40: 31, we are told that 'those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, [and] shall mount up with wings like eagles'.

Before we continue, it is briefly worth reflecting on the fact that features such as this beautifully carved eagle could be seen as 'graven images', which reminds us of the injunction of Exodus 20: 4. However, perhaps this indicates both that, like Calvin himself, members of the Reformed Church have recognized that this referred to representations of God, or any work of visual art worshipped in God's stead, and that carvings such as these were, like other works of visual art, symbols or sets of symbols pointing beyond themselves and not objects of worship themselves.

⁸⁸ Aad Peters, *Goods Woort blyft in der Ewicheyt : Zes Eeuwen Preekstoelen in de Grote of Sint-Bavokerk te Haarlem* (Haarlem: Vereniging Vrienden van de Grote Kerk te Haarlem, 2004), pp. 27-8.

Returning to the pulpit in St.-Bavokerk, we see many other symbols. For example, there is a dove, a common symbol not only for the Holy Spirit, but also for humility, meekness and simplicity. We also see representations of griffins. For earlier generations, this mythical creature, consisting of the body of a lion, the king of the earth, and the head of an eagle, the king of the air, alluded to Christ⁸⁹. In this regard, it was also seen as a symbol of his resurrection and ascension. The pulpit is also decorated with carvings representing different types of flower. As Aad Peters suggests, these allude to different virtues: the sunflower to piety, the cornflower to chastity and modesty and the marigold to trust⁹⁰. Such connections may not be made so easily in the mind of the modern worshipper. However, at the very least, I suggest that they would recall God's care for us in his creation and providential work.

We are reminded of the main function of the pulpit by the fact that on each side of the hexagonal sound board, apart from the one adjoining the column behind the pulpit, we see finely decorated cartouches containing the words '*Goods woort blyft inder ewicheyt*' ('God's word lives for ever'). Around these cartouches there is also much intricate decoration, including finely carved pomegranates. Like the eagle and dove, these too have several possible meanings. First, they could point to the decoration on the hem of the over-garment of the Jewish High Priests (Exodus 39: 24). Other Old Testament references to this fruit, which their depiction recalls, are the fact that the scouts who

⁸⁹ That said, the creature still seems to have had symbolic significance in more recent times. For example, it is used as the symbol for the *Vrije Universiteit*, Amsterdam, founded by the Abraham Kuyper, in 1880. Visit <http://www.vu.nl>.

⁹⁰ Peters, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-9.

returned from Canaan brought with them grapes, figs and pomegranates (Numbers 13: 23) and that the columns in Solomon's temple were decorated with this fruit (I Chronicles 4: 13). In the Middle Ages, mystics gave great importance to the Book of Song of Songs. Here, the pomegranate is used to represent beauty of the loved one or bride (Song of Songs 4: 3 and 6: 7). Even after the Middle Ages, this connection meant that the fruit was used as a reminder that the Church is the bride of Christ.

All of these allusions affirm the self-understanding of the Reformed Church as a natural successor to Israel and as part of the body of Christ. However, for Peters, the most likely reason for their use here is that in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the pomegranate represented the love of the fatherland and, more importantly, liberation⁹¹. When the soundboard was built, the siege of Haarlem by the Spanish had only recently been raised and another siege, that of Antwerp, had just begun, so questions of freedom were very much in people's minds at this time⁹².

History tells us, though, that just over two hundred years later, the Netherlands would again be subject to a foreign power, this time Napoleon's France⁹³. Beneath this pulpit, we can see that several coats of arms have been removed. Peters writes that the French took them away as they did not conform to the revolutionary ideals of freedom, equality

⁹¹ I should note that in a survey of reference books on the meaning of symbols in Christian art, I have not found a reference to the notion of freedom or liberation in the entries under 'pomegranate'. However, three of these books state that the pomegranate is a symbol for Resurrection, and it may be that the sense of freedom from death implicit within Resurrection was broadened so that the pomegranate came to stand for freedom in general. See: Gertrude Grace Sill, *A Handbook of Symbols in Christian Art* (London: Cassell, 1975), p. 56; Jennifer Speake, *The Dent Dictionary of Symbols in Christian Art* (London: J M Dent, 1994), p. 114; Peter and Linda Murray, *Oxford Dictionary of Christian Art* (Oxford: OUP, 1996), p. 197.

⁹² Peters, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁹³ Israel, *op. cit.*, p. 1128.

and brotherhood. He may be right, although it is unclear whether these coats of arms belonged to rich burghers or to officials such as churchwardens. Nevertheless, as he goes on to say, coats of arms were removed from other areas of the church. I do not believe that this was done merely out of a concern for the principle of equality, but was also about the removal of easily recognizable symbols of identity. The church is, in one sense, its people, so to remove symbols clearly associated with certain people is to attempt to reject the church's existing identity and to try and impose on it a new one⁹⁴.

Let us conclude our look at this wonderful work of art, by considering the two staircases, which join the pulpit to the ground, and in particular the ornate brass banisters which share the same design. One of the most interesting features is that the balustrades of each of the banisters are in the form of a snake. This of course alludes to evil and as the snake heads away from the pulpit, it is fleeing the truth of God's word. Under the balustrades, we see birds in the middle of grapes which remind us of the soul which drinks eternal salvation or which reaches heavenly joy. In the middle of each of the banisters, we see, somewhat surprisingly given what we have just said, a snake, this time alluding to eternity. It does this by biting its own tail, and thus creating a circle, which, as the reader will no doubt be aware, is an age-old symbol for eternity, as it has no beginning or end. This points us back to the words on the soundboard: 'God's word lives for ever'. Finally, on top of the bottom baluster of each of the banisters, we see a tortoise. These creatures always take their house with them and never leave them. For past generations, this spoke of the

⁹⁴ Peters, *op. cit.*, pp. 28-9.

protection of the church and the need to remain faithful to God⁹⁵.

So, we can see that far from being averse to symbols, some Reformed communities see them as a valuable means of communicating their self-understanding and in particular their relationship to God. Let us now look at another pulpit with ornate banisters and a certain amount of symbolism, that of the Nieuwe Kerk, Haarlem.

Like the pulpit in St.-Bavokerk, the one in the Nieuwe Kerk has two symmetrical staircases with brass banisters⁹⁶. Each of the four balustrades is supported at the bottom by a baluster in the shape of an acorn. These may be purely decorative or have symbolic significance. They may allude to the oak tree and the qualities ascribed to it such as strength and steadfastness, or remind us that something as great as an oak tree can come from something as small as an acorn⁹⁷. On the front and back of the pulpit itself are festoons, which, as I suggest above, recall Solomon's temple, as well as alluding to belief in the resurrection⁹⁸. Fruit and plant motives also decorate the pulpit, bespeaking God's providence.

The pulpit itself stands in the middle of the north arm of the inscribed Greek cross, which one might think would break the architectural unity of the church. However, other features ensure that this does not happen, and, in fact, the pulpit seems to support the spatial and stylistic unity of the church-building. The platform in which the preacher stands is square, echoing the shape of the building into which the Greek cross is inscribed.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

⁹⁶ For a picture of this pulpit, see: van Swigchem (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 178.

⁹⁷ 'Oak' in: Jean Chevalier and Alain Gheerbrant (eds.), John Buchanan-Brown (trans.), *A Dictionary of Symbols* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), pp. 709-710, at p. 710.

⁹⁸ See p. 174 above.

Likewise, the large sound board above it is square and on its underside, nine squares have been carved, forming a symmetrical three-by-three pattern. The soundboard is supported by four Greek columns, echoing those which form the border of the Greek cross in the church. So, it appears that there is a dynamic dialogue between the pulpit and the church as a whole, reminding us of the centrality of the preached Word to the church.

We also see Greek columns in the pulpit of the Westerkerk, Amsterdam. Some form the corners of each face of the hexagonal pulpit, whilst others seem to support it, although much of the weight is probably taken by the adjoining stone column. There are some attractive, mainly non-figurative, examples of wood-carving on the single staircase leading up to the pulpit and some grotesque figures at the bottom of the columns at the corners of each of its faces⁹⁹. However, apart from these, the pulpit is fairly plain, in keeping with the overall scheme and sensibility of the Westerkerk. In this regard, the pulpit together with its soundboard retains the unity of the church as it echoes the benches covered with canopies around each of the other central supporting columns, which in former times were hired by local dignitaries and people of wealth. Amongst these was the mayor of Amsterdam. His bench stood on the south side of the church, nearest to a small room where he could leave his horse to drink in a trough which can still be seen today¹⁰⁰. This little insight into the history of the church perhaps gives us an indication of the type of person who worshipped there.

No such considerations concerned the architects of the Jeruzalemkerk. Similarly, the

⁹⁹ J. Kamps-van Drunen et al., *op. cit.*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁰⁰ I visited the church on Friday 22nd April, 2005, and was shown this room and given this information by one of the church-guides, whom I thank for this.

pulpit in this church differs markedly not only from that of the Westerkerk, but also from all the other pulpits under discussion here. It may best be described as a desk in the shape of a stepped gable, reminiscent of the design of the tops of Dutch houses in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries¹⁰¹. This design is echoed by the wall above the pulpit, and together these features affirm the symmetry of the building, a feature typical of the Amsterdam School, the style in which the church was built¹⁰². But, perhaps more intriguingly, the pulpit fits into a scheme of number symbolism, which one might more readily associate with medieval church architecture. Marjanne Blonk reminds us that the numbers one to twelve each has significance in Christianity and that in many ways these numbers are represented by features of the Jeruzalemkerk¹⁰³. As we have seen, seven windows representing the days of Creation decorate the east and west walls of the church. Likewise, the church has seven entrances and the pulpit has seven steps, three on each side and one at the top. There is but one pulpit in the church and, as Blonk notes, there is one God whom we worship¹⁰⁴. As in other churches, the height of the pulpit has the practical purpose of allowing all worshippers to see the preacher, but it also reminds us of the importance of the Word in Reformed liturgy.

In our final example, the Noorderkerk, Amsterdam, this importance is affirmed both by the

¹⁰¹ M. Blonk, *op. cit.*, p. 26. For an example of this type of architecture, see: Emily Cole (ed.), *The Grammar of Architecture* (Boston: Bulfinch Press, c. 2002), pp. 246-7.

¹⁰² See pp. 166-7 above.

¹⁰³ Blonk, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-7. In fact, Blonk does not discuss the numbers eight and eleven, although, I suggest, it is possible to give these numbers significance within Christianity. Eight is one more than seven, the number of days of creation, and bespeaks God's abundance. See, for example, the octagonal baptistery opposite the *Duomo* in Florence, Italy. Eleven was the number of Jesus' disciples after Judas had left them.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*, p. 26.

position of the pulpit, which is the focal point of the pews, and the size of the soundboard. Although there is a small amount of decoration on the staircase and classical columns decorate the corners of the faces of the hexagonal pulpit, it really is the large soundboard that catches one's attention when worshipping in the Noorderkerk¹⁰⁵. The Word is of particular importance to a conservative church such as this, a fact reinforced by the inscription of the Ten Commandments on a plaque over the southwest entrance to the church¹⁰⁶. But, here we encounter a paradox, for despite this clear emphasis on God's Word, understood particularly as Scripture and as the sermon preached from Scripture, there is more decoration in this church than one might expect, and it is to this decoration, including indeed some paintings, that I devote the final part of this chapter.

Decoration in the Noorderkerk

I begin by noting in passing that in the Noorderkerk we see some of the decoration already familiar to us from our study of other churches in this chapter. As Richard Vervoorn writes, above the northeast door we see the three white crosses which form the coat of arms of the city of Amsterdam¹⁰⁷. Above this, in gold lettering on a black background, are words commemorating the founding of the church in 1620 and the first sermon preached there in 1623¹⁰⁸. We also find two instances of the coat of arms of Amsterdam in the former *kerkmeesters'* (churchwardens') room, behind the organ, which is now used as a

¹⁰⁵ To see the pulpit: Richard Vervoorn, 'Ruimte rond het Woord', in: Vervoorn (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 34-40, at p. 38, or visit: http://www.amsterdam.nl/stad_in_beeld/inhoud/alle_afleveringen/afleveringen/noorderkerk.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Vervoorn, 'Het interieur van de "Noorder"' in: Vervoorn (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 18-27, at p. 19.

¹⁰⁷ See p. 173-4 above, and Vervoorn (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

¹⁰⁸ Vervoorn (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 19.

vestry¹⁰⁹. One of these hangs over the mantelpiece, where it is displayed together with family coats of arms and the other can be seen in a framed picture of the coats of arms of previous churchwardens¹¹⁰.

To find pictures in side rooms is of course not uncommon in Reformed churches¹¹¹. However, to find them in the main worship area is less common. We see another depiction of coats of arms in a framed painting on a wall in the east arm of the Greek cross in which form the church is built. In this painting, made in 1737, we see the arms of four churchwardens from the Eilandskerk, a neighbouring church, which has now fallen into disuse. Interestingly, at the top of the painting, we see some cherubim, but in the centre we see some human figures in a scene that may allude to a historical event.

If we turn our attention to another piece of decoration, we see not so much landscape as cityscape. Under the organ hangs a collection of four engravings coloured in and framed in 1797. The largest of these engravings is a detailed plan of the church, showing all the seats and tombstones in the building, made by Pieter van den Berge in about 1725. Copies of these engravings were used to manage the hiring of seats in the eighteenth century. The other three engravings depict views of the Noorderkerk from the outside. These also portray features surrounding the church such as trees and neighbouring buildings and clearly give a sense of how the church sees itself as part of a wider community, rather than

¹⁰⁹ Pamphlet: 'Welcome to the Noorderkerk in Amsterdam', p. 3. I personally visited the Noorderkerk on Wednesday 27th April, 2005 to take pictures of all the features mentioned and to verify details given in the quoted literature.

¹¹⁰ The *Kerkmeesterswapenbord* by Jacob Verstegen, 1792. See: Vervoorn (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹¹¹ See Chapter Four, where I discuss the placing of works of art in the former vestry of the Oude Kerk, Amsterdam, and in the chapel in St. Nicholas' Church, Durham.

simply as a place of worship isolated from the rest of God's creation. This identification with its location is further emphasized by the use of Amsterdam's coat of arms at the top of the group of engravings¹¹².

Whereas this group of coloured engravings may loosely be described as a cityscape, the next two pictures that I want to look at may be seen as histories. The first of these, positioned appropriately in the entrance hall at the southwest corner of the church, is a drawing which depicts members of the church gathering at the entrance waiting for the gates to open to come inside to worship. It was made in 1890 by Johan Braakensiek and is a good example of a picture that shows how a church can see itself as a community that worships God throughout different periods in history¹¹³. This church, as part of the body of Christ, is not limited by time and place, but is connected to other Christians at different times and in different places. Again, this picture is not in the central area of the church, and like the other pictures I discuss here in no way participates in its acts of worship. However, like several other of the pictures I have described here, the second picture I want to look at hangs on the wall of an arm of the Greek Cross, this time the east wall of the south-facing arm. This may without doubt be described as a history painting. It depicts several members of a church sitting in benches behind the main pews, listening attentively to the Word of God being preached during a service. Although the church depicted is the Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam, the central motive of the painting, which is 'attentive listening [to the Word of God]', is equally applicable to the community of the

¹¹² Vervoorn, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-21.

¹¹³ C. Boerhout, 'Red de Noorder' in: Vervoorn (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 55-8, at p. 56.

Noorderkerk. In a church such as this, where the Lord's Supper is celebrated as seldom as four times a year, listening to the Word is the most important activity. This is what the church does and this defines what it is. There could be no clearer example of a piece of art bespeaking the identity of a church than this painting¹¹⁴.

I could leave matters there, thinking that I have provided a sufficient amount of evidence to show that Reformed churches are more receptive to works of art than some may believe and that we do not have so far to travel to gain acceptance for the more general use of paintings on the themes of history and landscapes in such churches. However, one further example perhaps illustrates well the ambiguity that Reformed churches may feel towards works of visual art, especially paintings.

It is clear that the Noorderkerk does not merely see itself as a place where God's Word can be proclaimed and heard. It also sees itself as a missionary church, needing to spread God's Word in the local community, and further afield¹¹⁵. This is evident from its development of a *drempelkerk* (lit. 'threshold church'), *Hebron*, which is used for outreach work and where services for those finding out about Christianity are held¹¹⁶. This is also clear from the open days that the church community holds several times a week, where people are invited to come and look around their place of worship. Here, they can find out information about the church's history, what it believes as a community and its current

¹¹⁴ Painted by Bernard de Hoog (1867-1943) in about 1890. See Pamphlet: 'Welcome to the Noorderkerk in Amsterdam', p. 2, and Vervoorn (ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 40.

¹¹⁵ This is also clear from the church's website, <http://www.noorderkerk.org>, and the essay: C. Blenk, 'En de stedelingen mogen opbloeien: De Noorderkerkgemeente, missionaire gemeente in de grote stad' in: Vervoorn (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 49-54, at p. 49.

¹¹⁶ Visit <http://www.noorderkerk.org>.

activities by talking to volunteers or through the various marketing tools on display. On the day that I visited the church, one such tool on show was an advertising board which emphasized the importance of the Bible¹¹⁷. With accompanying pictures, it described the Bible as the world's most read book, something that knows no boundaries and a living inspiration. It also described the Bible as a 'source of culture' and accompanied these words with a picture of Michelangelo's fresco of Adam and God on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. So, here, we see a recognition, perhaps unintentionally, that art does have a role, even in the more conservative churches in the Reformed tradition, in helping to define what Christian identity is and what Christians believe. That said, such an advertising board can, of course, be packed up and put away at the end of each day, and in this form, a reprint of a picture, on a piece of cardboard, accompanied by words carefully chosen, it may not raise too many concerns amongst Reformed worshippers. It is perhaps more difficult, and possibly more risky, to hang original paintings in such churches and leave them for worshippers to reflect and meditate on, providing them with insights into God's action in the world, which they had not previously considered and which may require them to at least reconsider their understanding of the Bible.

Conclusion

This then brings us to the end of our journey through some of the decoration in these five Dutch Reformed churches. Each of them contains interesting works of art and invites a fundamental challenge to our ideas about what decoration we might expect to see in such churches.

¹¹⁷ See n. -109 above.

Although we have seen paintings on the wings of the organ in the Westerkerk and indeed would find various paintings, including a Biblical history, in the St.-Bavokerk¹¹⁸, it is in the Noorderkerk, Amsterdam, arguably the most conservative of the five churches in our study, where we find those which are of particular interest to us. As with the other types of decoration that I have discussed in this chapter, the works of art in the Noorderkerk, in particular the paintings, bespeak the church's identity, both as a place where the Word of God can be heard but also as a church situated in a community to which it must take God's Word. Further, one of the paintings we have seen in this church is clearly a history painting and the picture which includes three engravings of the church in its locality does, I suggest, allow us to argue for the introduction of landscape paintings into it and other churches in or influenced by the Reformed tradition.

So, now that we have, so to speak, opened the door for the introduction of history and landscape paintings into Reformed churches, let us look in the next two chapters at one history, Rembrandt's *Supper at Emmaus* (1648: The Louvre, Paris) and one landscape, Jacob van Ruisdael's *Het Korenveld* (c. 1660: Museum Boijmans van Beuningen,

¹¹⁸ The history painting to which I refer is a depiction of the washing of Christ's feet by Mary Magdalen. It was painted in the last quarter of the sixteenth century by a member of the Early Flemish School. It does not in fact belong to the church, but is on long-term loan from a hospital, the Elisabeth Gasthuis. However, it is positioned on the wall opposite the public entrance to the church and so is in clear view of all who visit it.

Again, what is particularly interesting about this painting is that it depicts Christ, and thus goes against Calvin's injunction to not represent Christ in art. I discuss this matter earlier in this chapter in relation to a stained-glass window in the Nieuwe Kerk, Haarlem, and also look at how we can address Calvin's injunction in Chapter Six.

The information on the painting was provided to me in an email dated 27th April, 2005 by the vergers of the church, Henk Soetens, and is based on an assessment of this and other artefacts in St.-Bavokerk carried out by Christie's in 2004. I thank mr. Soetens for this information. Further paintings in this church include a work depicting the coats of arms of benefactors to the church on the south wall (1658), and a picture of the church building from the outside, painted by Pieter Gerritsz. (1518), also on the south wall.

Rotterdam), to see what such works of art can tell us about the identity of the church and God's action in the world.

Chapter Six: Rembrandt's *The Risen Christ at Emmaus* (1648): the epistemological value of a history painting¹

Introduction

In the last chapter, we looked in detail at the decoration of features such as windows, organs and pulpits that we already find in certain churches in the Reformed tradition. After our survey, we concluded that the presence of this decoration in these churches means that the distance we must travel in order to gain acceptance for the use of other works of visual art, in particular history and landscape paintings, in these and other churches in this tradition is that much less. This being so, it is now time to look at specific examples of these two types of painting that we might place in Reformed churches and consider how they can help us increase our knowledge of God's actions in the world, this being one of Calvin's epistemological imperatives at the beginning of *Institutes*².

In the next chapter, we will look at what landscape paintings by the Dutch artist, Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/9-1682), can tell us about God's creative and providential work. But in this chapter, I want to look at certain histories by his compatriot, Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-1669).

As readers will know, Rembrandt painted, etched and drew numerous historical scenes, including many based on stories from the Bible³. One of the stories that he

¹ Two paintings of the Supper at Emmaus dated 1648 have been ascribed to Rembrandt. One, Bredius 579, hangs in the *Statens Museum for Kunst*, Copenhagen. The other, Bredius 578, hangs in the *Musée du Louvre*, Paris. In this chapter, I deal with the latter. For copies of both, see: Schwartz, *op. cit.*, p. 247, and plates 8 and 9.

² *Institutes* I, i, 1.

³ Jakob Rosenberg notes that Rembrandt produced a total of about eight hundred and fifty works with Biblical subjects. See: J. Rosenberg, *Rembrandt: Life and Work* (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), p. 169. See also the *Rembrandtbijbel*, a Dutch language Bible illustrated with works on Biblical themes by Rembrandt. This is discussed in: W. A. Visser 't Hooft, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

depicted most often was Luke's account of the Supper at Emmaus⁴, and in what follows, I will look primarily at what is arguably the artist's most remarkable depiction of this story: the 1648 painting, *The Risen Christ at Emmaus*, which hangs in the *Musée du Louvre*, Paris (plate 8). In doing this, I will address two questions.

The first of these is whether it would be appropriate to hang this, or similar paintings, in a church in the Reformed tradition to-day. It is clear that the work can be considered a history painting, and, as I have already noted⁵, it was to this type of painting that John Calvin raised least objection. And although Calvin at one point argued that all works of visual art should be removed from churches⁶, over time a number of paintings, particularly history paintings⁷, have been introduced into churches in the Reformed tradition.

But what sets this painting by Rembrandt apart from most of these other paintings is that it depicts Christ. For Calvin, it was inappropriate to represent Christ in visual art as it portrayed only half of him: his human nature, but not his divine one⁸. We do find depictions of Christ in Reformed churches, but these are largely limited to stained-glass windows⁹, a form of visual art deemed relatively inoffensive to Calvinists¹⁰. But, we find very little evidence of paintings depicting Christ in Reformed churches¹¹, so I will begin by looking at the arguments Calvin used to oppose the depiction of Christ in art

⁴ Luke 24. See in particular: J. Q. van Regteren Altena, 'Rembrandt's Way to Emmaus' in: *Kunstmuseets Aarsskrift*, Vol. 35, No. 6 (1948/9), pp. 1-26, and Visser 't Hooft, *op. cit.*, pp. 16 and 23.

⁵ See Chapter One.

⁶ *Institutes* I, xi, 13.

⁷ See Chapter Five for examples in the Noorderkerk, Amsterdam and St.-Bavokerk, Haarlem.

⁸ Wencelius, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

⁹ For example, in the Reformed St. Janskerk, Gouda, Netherlands (visit:<http://www.vrtour.nl/stjanskerkgouda>), and Nieuwe Kerk, Haarlem (see Chapter Five).

¹⁰ Philip Benedict (1999), *op. cit.*, at p. 30.

¹¹ See Chapter Five, n. 118 for one notable example in St.-Bavokerk, Haarlem.

and more specifically at whether it is acceptable within the Reformed tradition to depict Christ in painting.

Once I have addressed these issues, I will then turn to a second question: what is it that we can learn of God's actions in the world from a painting such as this? Here, I will begin by suggesting that this painting can teach us about the nature of faith. I will then go on to argue, more controversially, that whilst other readings are possible, in this painting Rembrandt, whether or not he intended it, has provided us with a valuable means by which we can develop our understanding of Calvin's account of the Lord's Supper. There is a richness in his understanding, which has been lost in churches in the Reformed tradition¹², and there would, of course, be a certain irony if we could recover some of this richness by engaging with an art form, visual art, which Calvin himself did not consider to be a useful means for communicating the truth¹³.

As we look at Rembrandt's work, we will also consider other paintings of the Supper at Emmaus. One of these is *Christ at Emmaus* by Rembrandt's fellow Dutch artist Jan Steen (c.1625-1679)¹⁴. Steen was a Catholic and it is argued that his work is consistent with the orthodox Catholic position on the Eucharist at the time¹⁵. So it will be interesting to compare and contrast his work with that of Rembrandt at appropriate points during this chapter.

¹² Donald Bridge and David Phypers, *The Meal that Unites?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1981), p. 151, and Robert Shelton, 'A Theology of the Lord's Supper from the Perspective of the Reformed Tradition', in: Donald K. McKim (ed.), *Major Themes in the Reformed Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), pp. 259-270, at pp. 259-60.

¹³ See Chapter One, n. 2.

¹⁴ Baruch D. Kirschenbaum, *The Religious and Historical Paintings of Jan Steen* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977), p. 138.

¹⁵ Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., 'The Supper at Emmaus' in: Guido M.C. Jansen (ed.), *Jan Steen: Painter and Storyteller* (Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1996), pp. 200-2, at p. 200.

The depiction of Christ in art

But, for now, let us begin by considering whether it is appropriate to hang a painting which depicts Christ in a Reformed church.

Art should *allude* to Christ's divinity and humanity, but not try to *represent* them

For Calvin it is not appropriate, because to represent Christ is to falsify his nature and shows us only half of him, for he is at once man and God¹⁶. In his Sermon on Deuteronomy, Chapter IV (vv. 15-20), he argues that to represent Christ is to extinguish his divine majesty and that as Christ is God incarnate, we cannot allow for representations of his flesh alone¹⁷. Underlying this argument is the material/spirit dichotomy which certain commentators see as central to Calvin's theology¹⁸. According to this, it is acceptable to represent the material with material, e.g. flesh with paint, but it is not acceptable to represent the divine, which is spirit, with material. We see this expressed most clearly in the section on the second commandment in the Geneva Catechism (1545):

Master: Why is it forbidden to represent God in visible shape?

*Catechumen: Because there is no resemblance between him, who is Spirit eternal and incomprehensible, and corporeal, corruptible and dead figures...*¹⁹

But, we must ask whether Rembrandt is really trying to *represent* Christ's divinity in this and other paintings in which we see the figure of Christ. I wonder, rather, whether he is trying to hint at, point to or even allude to Christ's divinity. Rembrandt does not

¹⁶ Wencelius, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

¹⁷ *CR LIV, CO.XXVI*, p. 157.

¹⁸ See, for example: Alexandre Ganoczy, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-201. See also Chapter One.

¹⁹ John Calvin, *Theological Treatises*, J. K. S. Reid (trans. and ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 109. For the original Latin and French, see Chapter One, n. 33.

try to do God's work by bringing heaven to earth, but uses his pallet to suggest divinity, and no more²⁰. In this painting, Rembrandt uses light, colour and the height of the alcove behind Christ to suggest his divinity²¹. Elsewhere, he uses the outline of a cloud above Christ's head for the same purpose²². We may contrast this approach to dealing with Christ's divinity in art with that of Rembrandt's Flemish contemporary and rival, Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640). In many of his paintings, such as *The Deposition of Christ* (1616-17)²³ now in Antwerp Cathedral, Rubens presents Christ as if he were an Olympian god and tries to convince us of his divinity by bringing heaven to earth. Rubens' work is of course an artistic masterpiece, and this is not in question. But the point I wish to make is that whereas he tries to depict Christ as a super-natural being and in some sense present his divinity on canvas, Rembrandt does not. He rather alludes to it, recognizing that it lies beyond the canvas. In doing so, he shows us that it is possible to depict Christ in art without in any way trying to *represent* his divinity.

Taking this idea one step further, it may be worth asking whether the artist tries to represent Christ's humanity, or merely allude to it. We have no Biblical account of Christ's external appearance and so can in no way claim to portray him accurately in art. But, even if we did have a record of what Christ looked like, we would still encounter difficulties in trying to represent him. Even portraits of people other than

²⁰ Compare Calvin Seerveld, *A Christian Critique of Art and Literature* (revised ed.) (Sioux Center, Iowa: Dordt College Press, 1995), p. 70, where Seerveld says, 'Christian art does not try to build a heaven on earth ahead of time'.

²¹ I discuss how Rembrandt uses each of these to allude to Christ's divinity in more detail below (see pp. 204-5 and 219-21). There, the reader will also find a discussion of other techniques Rembrandt uses for the same purpose. See also: Rosenberg, *op. cit.*, p. 175.

²² For example, in the drawing entitled *Christ and the Two Disciples on their Way to Emmaus*, (Benesch 585). See this in: John I. Durham, *The Biblical Rembrandt* (Macon, Georgia: Macon University Press, 2004), p. 226.

²³ This date is given by Walter Liedtke in his article 'The Picture: Dutch and Flemish' in: Martin Kemp (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 238-245, at p. 238.

Christ, such as many of those that Rembrandt painted, which aim at verisimilitude²⁴, must exclude certain features of the people they represent. They are two-dimensional, not three-dimensional, they will not capture every feature of the subject's face and of course they do not speak or breathe²⁵. I suggest that the artist must content him or herself with alluding to humanity, rather than trying to capture it on canvas. In the depictions of Christ that he painted from the mid-1640s onwards, Rembrandt uses a Jewish model with a beard and long hair to make the viewer think of Christ the man. Likewise, in some of these paintings, he depicts the figure's eyes looking downwards, suggesting the humility of Christ the man²⁶. He is in no way trying to convince us that he has captured Christ's humanity on canvas. Rather, by depicting certain well-chosen features, inner and outer, he points to Christ's humanity and prompts the viewer to call this to mind. Similarly, in *The Risen Christ at Emmaus (1648)*, Rembrandt in no way tries to capture Christ's divinity. He merely alludes to it by using light, colour and other appropriate artistic techniques.

Calvin's opposition to the Seventh Ecumenical Council

This, then, is one approach to dealing with Calvin's opposition to the portrayal of Christ in visual art. Another is to consider how Calvin, a theologian who paid great attention to the authority and opinions of earlier church leaders²⁷, dealt with the decision by the Seventh Ecumenical Council (Nicaea II) in 787 to allow for the use of icons, including those representing Christ. As James Payton notes, Calvin generally

²⁴ See, for example, his portrait of Johannes Wtenbogaert (Bredius 173) in: Schwartz, *op. cit.*, p. 149, and his late self-portraits (Schwartz, pp. 346-355).

²⁵ For a discussion of the process of exclusions on which works of art function, see: Edwards, *op. cit.*, pp. 208-10. See also: Charbonnier, *op. cit.*, pp. 150 f. for Claude Lévi-Strauss' account of this process.

²⁶ Schwartz, *op. cit.*, pp. 284-5, especially Bredius 620, 622 and 624.

²⁷ Consider Calvin's numerous references to the work of Augustine of Hippo. See also: Anthony N. S. Lane, *John Calvin: Student of the Church Fathers* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999).

had a high regard for the ecumenical councils and their authority, but it is clear that he rejected the decision of this particular council²⁸. Perhaps this should not surprise us, as its decision contradicts his position on the depiction of Christ in art. But what is of particular interest is how Calvin sets about rejecting the council's decision. There were several editions of the acts of the council in print in the mid-1500s²⁹, but Calvin chose to base his arguments against the council's decision not on these, but on the *Libri Carolini*, four books prepared at the direction of the Emperor Charlemagne in response to the actions of the council³⁰. This is of note as the *Libri Carolini* seem to suggest that the decision of the council was based on arguments supported by misuses of Scripture. Calvin quotes these misuses, and in doing so is able to ridicule and thus reject the decision of the council. However, James Payton argues that Calvin knew that the *Libri Carolini* were hostile to the decision of Nicaea II and that he should thus not have used them as his source³¹. He may be right, though he seems to suggest that Calvin would have known that because the *Libri Carolini* were hostile to the decision of the council, they were therefore unreliable. This is going too far, for hostility does not equate to unreliability. However, Payton is right to say that Calvin could have used more critical judgment than he appears to have done in this case³², and of course, it must be admitted that the use of this source suited Calvin's purposes very well.

²⁸ James R. Payton, 'Calvin and the Legitimation of Icons: His Treatment of the Seventh Ecumenical Council', in: *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte*, Vol. 84, 1993, pp. 222-241, at p. 227.

²⁹ At one point (*ibid.*, pp. 234-5), James Payton suggests that these acts could have been available to Calvin to read. He then goes on to argue (p. 234, n. 68) that in *Institutes* IV, ix, 9, Calvin claims to have read the acts of the Council and so should have no excuse for not correctly reporting them. However, I do not agree that what Calvin says here can be taken as a categorical claim that he read them. He does not say 'I read them and they say...'. Rather, he may be referring to the second-hand knowledge he gained of them through the *Libri Carolini*, which he uses in *Institutes* I, xi, 14-16.

³⁰ *Institutes* I, xi, 14-16, esp. notes 27 and 28, and Payton, *op. cit.*, pp. 234-5.

³¹ Payton, *op. cit.*, pp. 234 and 240-1.

³² *ibid.*, pp. 240-1.

As well as the sources Calvin uses, there is another point concerning his approach to Nicaea II which demands our attention. Those who supported the use of religious images³³, the iconodules, represented in particular by John of Damascus, argued that God had forbidden the making of images of himself in the Old Testament, because he intended to send an image of himself in the form of his incarnate Son. As this had now been fulfilled in Christ, it was permissible to produce icons of God in the flesh³⁴. However, in his account of Nicaea II, Calvin entirely avoids considering the implications of the incarnation for the second commandment. Here, some accuse him of being inconsistent, for when he addresses the fourth commandment, which exhorts the strict observance of the Sabbath, he is quite happy to say that as a result of the incarnation its injunctions can now be ignored³⁵. That said, we might ask whether the iconodules are right to say that the incarnation does allow us to depict Christ in art. For, we should remember that it was God who chose to circumscribe himself and become incarnate. Calvin and his followers might argue that if we depict Christ, artists and viewers may be prone to doing God's work and try to circumscribe him or limit his freedom³⁶. So to address this concern, we should consider that the artist's role is to allude to both Christ's humanity and his divinity, in a way which recognizes the current

³³ I use the word 'images' here as the debate at the Seventh Ecumenical Council concerned works which were deemed to have a relationship to the divine, in particular icons. However, whether or not a work of visual art is a religious image depends to an extent on the viewer. This is so even when we are dealing with depictions of Christ, as Calvin himself seems to implicitly acknowledge when he makes a distinction between those depictions of Christ to which some ascribe divine powers and others to which no special powers are ascribed in his *An Inventory of Relics*. See below. See also Chapter One, where I discuss the relationship between religious images and other works of visual art in more detail.

³⁴ Payton, *op. cit.*, pp. 223-4.

³⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 228-9.

³⁶ Green, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

incompleteness of our knowledge of him³⁷.

Depictions of Christ that Calvin specifically rejected and depictions of Christ already in Reformed churches

We may get a better idea of Calvin's specific concerns in relation to depictions of Christ if we look at his *An Inventory of Relics* (1543). Here, it is clear that he is particularly opposed to crucifixes³⁸. He also mentions his opposition to them in his Sermon on Deuteronomy, Chapter IV (vv. 15-20) referred to above³⁹. I suggest that this is because crucifixes focus on the death rather than the resurrection of Christ⁴⁰. In this regard, Calvin's followers showed a particular dislike for representations of the Trinity known as the *Gnadenstuhl* ('Seat of Mercy'), which included depictions of Christ on the cross. This may have been partly because they represented God the Father, but also, I suggest, because they included depictions of the crucifixion⁴¹.

As well as crucifixes, Calvin also disliked depictions of Christ, to which, like relics, people ascribed special powers. He gives examples such as,

A picture of our Lord, said to have been taken at the time when he was

³⁷ By considering the artistic process in this way, we also avoid another potential problem. Calvin tells us that it is permissible to paint what we can see (*Institutes* I, xi, 12). He forbids the depiction of Christ because his divine nature cannot be represented. However, every human being has a soul. Calvin does not prohibit the depiction of humans. But, if he applied his reasoning for prohibiting the depiction of Christ consistently, he would also have to forbid the depiction of humans. Calvin might respond that the human soul, though immortal, is nevertheless created, and it is this that distinguishes it from the divine. However, he does acknowledge that the human soul is spirit, and it is, of course, because God is spirit and the divine nature of Christ is spirit that he prohibits the depiction of them in visual art. This perhaps illustrates that it is not particularly appropriate to apply strict dichotomies such as that between material and spirit, which Calvin is so keen on, to questions as subtle as those we meet in the field of aesthetics. For a discussion on Calvin's understanding of the human soul, see: Wendel, *op. cit.*, pp. 173-7.

³⁸ John Calvin, 'An Inventory of Relics', *op. cit.*, p. 315. Note that this work is more often referred to as *A Treatise on Relics*.

³⁹ *CR LIV, CO XXVI*, p. 157. See p. 194 above.

⁴⁰ I also wonder whether Calvin objected to depictions of the crucifix because of the possible association between these and those pieces of wood associated with the cult of the true cross. I have no evidence for this, but suggest it might be a fruitful avenue for further study.

⁴¹ See Chapter One, especially n. 44.

*twelve years old...[and]... another at Lucca, which they say was painted by angels, and is called 'The Holy Countenance'*⁴².

But, just before he discusses these particular works, Calvin does seem to make a distinction between these works that may be seen as religious images, and more ordinary ones to which no special powers are ascribed⁴³. He writes,

*...let us now attend to what is said of images [of Christ], I mean not those which are usually made by painters, sculptors and artists... [but] those which possess some special claim to respect, and are regarded as singular and precious, as being of the nature of relics*⁴⁴.

So, this may indicate that for Calvin some representations of Christ were acceptable, although it does seem to contradict his firm rejection of them in his Sermon on Deuteronomy Chapter IV (vv. 15-20) delivered in May, 1555. Indeed, with a few notable exceptions such as St. Janskerk, Gouda⁴⁵, churches influenced by Calvin do seem to have excluded any depictions of Christ in the first instance. However, we do find fairly early allusions to Christ in the decoration of Reformed churches. For example, on the pulpit of St.-Bavokerk, Haarlem, built in 1679, we find allusions to Christ in the form of an eagle, a griffin and even pomegranates. Again, many organs are decorated with statues of King David, such as the fine Müller organ, also in St.-Bavokerk, Haarlem, built in around 1735⁴⁶. Although this primarily refers to David's role as a musician and as the composer of many of the Psalms, it should not be

⁴² John Calvin, 'An Inventory of Relics', *op. cit.*, p. 314. 'The Holy Countenance' is a wooden carving that can in fact still be seen in Lucca Cathedral to-day. For a picture of the carving, visit http://www.knowital.com/html/lucca_-_the_cathedral.html.

⁴³ See n. 33 above.

⁴⁴ John Calvin, 'An Inventory of Relics', *op. cit.*, p. 314.

⁴⁵ See n. 9 above.

⁴⁶ See Chapter Five.

forgotten that Calvin himself⁴⁷ and subsequent generations still saw David as the prefiguration of Christ.

More recently, we have begun to see depictions of Christ incarnate. Above the door in the east arm of the Greek cross inscribed into the Nieuwe Kerk, Haarlem, we see a stained-glass window depicting the baptism of Christ, created by Jaap Pronk in 1936⁴⁸, and opposite the public entrance to the St.-Bavokerk, Haarlem, we see a history painting depicting the washing of Christ's feet by Mary Magdalen⁴⁹. So, we see that, over time, there has been a gradual relaxation in certain parts of the Reformed movement towards the depiction of Christ in visual art. However, for many communities in this tradition this still seems to be a step too far. But, I suggest that if they were to reflect on what we have discussed above, then they might be prepared to revise their attitude towards the use of depictions of Christ in visual art in their churches. And to help that process, this is perhaps a good point at which to recap the arguments we have made in this regard.

First, we have seen that if we consider that the artist's role is not to *represent* Christ's divinity, but rather to allude to it, and indeed to allude to his humanity, then depictions of him should be acceptable to those in the Reformed tradition. Secondly, we have looked at how Calvin addressed the decision of the Seventh Ecumenical Council which itself affirmed the depiction of Christ in art. Here, we saw that his use of sources such as the *Libri Carolini* should at least be questioned. Finally, we have seen with respect

⁴⁷ *Institutes* II, xii, 2, and II, x, 15-18.

⁴⁸ Carine Hoogveld et al. (eds.), *op. cit.*, p. 311.

⁴⁹ See Chapter Five, n. 118. It should be noted that there is no Biblical account of Mary Magdalen washing Christ's feet. Rather, the story of an unnamed woman bathing Christ's feet with her tears (Luke 7: 36 ff.) has been conflated with that of Christ's encounter with Mary Magdalen in Luke 8: 2 in Christian tradition.

to his *An Inventory of Relics* (1543), that Calvin's particular concern lay not so much with all depictions of Christ, but, rather, with certain types of depictions such as crucifixes and those to which people ascribed special powers.

So, with these arguments in mind, let us now begin to look at the painting that will concern us for most of the rest of this chapter, Rembrandt's *The Risen Christ at Emmaus* (1648) (plate 8), in order to see what we can learn of God's action in the world.

What the Lucan account of the Supper at Emmaus meant to Rembrandt

One way of doing this is to begin by considering what the subject of the painting, the Supper at Emmaus, would have meant to Rembrandt himself. W. A. Visser 't Hooft tells us the artist treated the subject no less than eighteen times⁵⁰, and perhaps what is equally noteworthy is that over thirty years elapsed between the first time he depicted it and the last⁵¹. In most of these works, as in *The Risen Christ at Emmaus* (1648), Rembrandt depicts the point in the narrative at which Christ breaks the bread and his disciples recognize him (Luke 24: 30-31). I suggest that Rembrandt chooses to portray this point in the narrative as it allows him to deal with the subject of faith in the risen Christ⁵².

Faith in the Risen Christ

He does this in particular by contrasting the reaction of the two disciples with that of

⁵⁰ Visser 't Hooft, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

⁵¹ The first work on the subject is the painting of 1628/9 which hangs in the *Musée Jacquemart-André* (Bredius 539, see: Schwartz, *op. cit.*, p. 51). The last time Rembrandt treated the Supper at Emmaus was in about 1661. In that year, he produced another painting of the subject which hangs in the *Musée du Louvre* (see Visser 't Hooft, *op. cit.*, p. 16) and a drawing (Valentiner 529, see: van Regteren Altena, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19).

⁵² Compare: 'The theme of Christ at Emmaus...probably derived its significance entirely from the importance of the risen Christ appearing to the disciples...' (*Rembrandt Research Project Vol. IV*, Bredius 578, *The Supper at Emmaus*, p. 9, yet to be published).

the servant boy. Whereas the disciples clearly recognize Christ as he breaks the bread, the servant boy does not recognize him, but looks straight past him⁵³. The servant boy, who does not appear in Luke's account, is a good example of how in this painting, as in others, Rembrandt borrows motives from other artists and re-works them for his own purposes. One of Rubens' early works, *Christ and the Disciples of Emmaus*, which can be found in the church of St. Eustache, Paris, also deals with the Supper at Emmaus. On the right of this painting is an elderly servant woman, who wears a white cloth on her head, and seems more concerned with one of the disciples than with the fact that she is standing next to the risen Christ⁵⁴. In another version of Rembrandt's 1648 painting, which hangs in the *Statens Museum for Kunst*, Copenhagen⁵⁵ (plate 9), we see a similar servant woman, although this one is accompanied by a younger servant boy. Neither of these characters recognizes the importance of their guest, in contrast to the two disciples at the table. In the *Louvre* painting, we have just the servant boy, but as with the figures in the Rubens painting and Rembrandt's Copenhagen painting, he does not recognize that he is in the presence of the risen Christ.

Faith in things unseen

But this is not just a painting which distinguishes between those who have faith and those who do not. It also asks us to reflect on the fact that those who do have faith are required to have it in things unseen. John Durham suggests that changes over time in his treatment of this subject, as well as in his treatment of the subjects of Abraham's

⁵³ Herbert Fendrich, *Rembrandts Darstellungen des Emmausmahles* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Verlag Peter Lang, 1990), pp. 72-3.

⁵⁴ van Regteren Altena, *op. cit.*, pp. 16-18.

⁵⁵ See n. 1 above.

sacrifice of Isaac and of David playing the harp to Saul, show how Rembrandt had taken to heart the first verse of the Letter to the Hebrews, Chapter 11, 'Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen' (NRSV)⁵⁶. I agree with Durham that Rembrandt does address the question of faith unseen in this and other works, but rather than moving towards the subject in a linear manner and treating it more in the latter part of his career than in the earlier part, as Durham seems to suggest, I would argue that Rembrandt constantly struggles with this subject throughout his time as an artist. We can see this by looking at several of his works on the theme of the Supper at Emmaus, where he is clearly wrestling with the question of how to represent the fact that when Christ breaks the bread and the disciples recognize him, he immediately disappears. In the 1628/9 painting in the *Musée Jacquemart André*, Paris, *Christ at Emmaus* (plate 10), Christ is depicted almost as a shadow, although one is left to wonder whether the light that glows behind Christ comes from him or from a candle placed behind him⁵⁷. By contrast, in an etching of 1634 (plate 11), the figure of Christ is depicted as clearly as those of the two disciples also present, although the extended corona around Christ's head perhaps alludes not only to his divinity, but also to the fact that he is about to disappear⁵⁸. This last point may seem fanciful, until one looks at a drawing from about 1645 (plate 12), in which Rembrandt does not depict the figure of Christ at all, but rather a burst of light, suggesting that he has just left the disciples after they have recognized him⁵⁹. In the 1648 *Louvre* painting, Christ is again depicted clearly. And, as in the 1634 etching, a corona around

⁵⁶ Durham, *op. cit.*, pp. 141 ff.

⁵⁷ Schwartz, *op. cit.*, p. 51 (Bredius 539).

⁵⁸ Fendrich, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

⁵⁹ *ibid.* (Catalogue: Benesch C 47).

his head may allude to his imminent departure, as may the fact that his eyes look heavenwards⁶⁰. In addition, the colour of his cloak is almost gold, which traditionally alludes to heaven⁶¹. Finally, it is interesting to note that one solution Rembrandt does not adopt in any of his works is to depict Christ as an apparition. By contrast, Jan Steen chooses this approach in his depiction of Christ in his later painting, *Christ at Emmaus* (plate 13)⁶². Perhaps Rembrandt does not adopt such an approach here as he wants to affirm that Christ is really present, both to the disciples at Emmaus and in the Lord's Supper⁶³.

Union with Christ

So, it is clear that faith and more particularly faith in things unseen is a theme which the story of the Supper at Emmaus allows Rembrandt to address. However, I wonder if Visser 't Hooft makes an even more important contribution to this discussion when he suggests that Rembrandt, consciously or unconsciously, may have adopted the ancient tradition that only those who are united with Christ truly know him⁶⁴. Indeed, in this painting the disciples are formally united with Christ in several ways. Firstly, an equilateral triangle is formed around Christ, with his head at the top of the triangle and the base running between the right elbow of the disciple on the left and the

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p. 60. Fendrich comments that Rembrandt may be borrowing from Guido Reni here.

⁶¹ *ibid.*, p. 47.

⁶² Wheelock, *op. cit.*, p. 201.

⁶³ Here, I disagree with Arthur Wheelock (Wheelock, *op. cit.*, p. 202, n. 4) where he seems to suggest that Rembrandt's emphasis is on a spiritual Christ. I think that Rembrandt provides a balance between Christ being joined to the Godhead, whilst also being in union with those people who have faith. That said, we do need to ask in what sense Christ is present at the Lord's Supper. Clearly, there is a variety of theological positions on this matter. I look at Calvin's position later in this chapter. But here, it is important to remember that for Calvin, Christ is present in the Lord's Supper, though he remains in heaven. By the power of the Holy Spirit, our hearts are lifted to heaven in the *sursum corda*, and Christ is present to us there. So, for Calvin the question is not one of whether Christ is present, but rather one of where he is present. This being so, I suggest that this work of art, with its references to heaven, is not inconsistent with Calvin's understanding of the Lord's Supper.

⁶⁴ Visser 't Hooft, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-7.

outstretched hand of the disciple on the right⁶⁵. Secondly, the dish of the disciple on the left and the napkin of the disciple on the right both touch the white table cloth, as does Christ, again uniting all three figures⁶⁶. Finally, Christ and the two disciples all wear clothing which is coloured in shades of browns and golds. This contrasts with the green clothing of the servant boy. In the tradition to which Visser 't Hooft refers, there is a strong sense in which this unity with Christ is established through partaking in the Lord's Supper. One might reasonably ask why Rembrandt does not use the subject of the Last Supper to allude to the Lord's Supper, for it is more usual to make a link between the Lord's Supper and the Last Supper than one between the Lord's Supper and the Supper at Emmaus⁶⁷. However, there is a strong tradition which links the Supper at Emmaus with the Lord's Supper. Augustine of Hippo certainly saw the meal at Emmaus as a communion meal, as did Rembrandt's Remonstrant contemporary, Hugo Grotius (1583-1645)⁶⁸. Indeed, Visser 't Hooft and Herbert Fendrich, who is in no doubt that the Supper at Emmaus is a communion meal, both suggest that the reason Rembrandt chose this subject to engage with the Supper at Emmaus as against the theme of the Last Supper, is that the Emmaus story allows him to express all that is true about the Lord's Supper, in particular with its emphasis on

⁶⁵ Fendrich, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

⁶⁷ John Reumann, *The Supper of the Lord: the New Testament, ecumenical dialogues and faith and order on Eucharist* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), p. 5. The Last Supper is also referred to in Eucharistic liturgies including Petrus Dathenus' *Avondmaalsformulier*, which was used by Reformed churches during Rembrandt's life. This incorporates the words of institution from I Corinthians 11: 23-29. See: Petrus Dathenus: *De CL Psalmen des Propheten Davids...mitsgaders de Christelicke Catechismus, de Belijdenisse des Geloofs end naerder Verklaringe...als oock de Liturgie derselve [Gereformeerde] Kercken, ofte de Formulieren van de Bedieninge der Heyliger Sacramenten...* (Leyden: gedrukt by Paulus Aertsz. Van Ravesteyn, 1640), p. 51. See also: Otto J. de Jong, *Nederlandsche Kerkgeschiedenis*, 3rd ed. (Nijkerk: G. F. Callenbach N. V., 1985), p. 163. The link between the Lord's Supper and the Last Supper is also made in the Heidelberg Catechism (Sunday 28, question 77). See Zwanepol, *op. cit.*, p. 90.

⁶⁸ Visser 't Hooft, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-7.

the risen Christ⁶⁹.

The possibility of Catholic and Mennonite readings of Rembrandt's *The Risen Christ at Emmaus* (1648)

But, we need to constantly bear in mind that even if some people have made this connection, it does not necessarily follow that Rembrandt did so, and as we shall see there is little to suggest that the connection was self-evident for Calvin, or those in the Reformed Church⁷⁰. However, what is clear is that for Catholic theologians at this time, there was a definite link between the Supper at Emmaus and the Eucharist. According to them, Christ blessing the bread and breaking it, both of which he does in Luke 24: 30, was a Eucharistic reality⁷¹. This connection lies behind the depiction of the Supper at Emmaus by the Catholic artist Jan Steen⁷². Interestingly, one of the sources for Steen's work was Rembrandt's 1648 *Louvre* painting, and although Steen's treatment of Christ is quite different from that of Rembrandt, it could be argued that Rembrandt's depiction of Christ breaking the bread, whilst clearly consistent with the Reformed position on the Lord's Supper, also reflects orthodox Catholic Eucharistic doctrine. It may seem fanciful to suggest, but I wonder whether, given that we have no definite record of the painting before a sale in Amsterdam in 1734⁷³, Rembrandt might have painted it for a Catholic *schuilkerk* ('concealed church') in Amsterdam⁷⁴. We may never know.

Another reading of the work is that it is an exposition of the Mennonite understanding

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p. 27, and Fendrich, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

⁷⁰ See pp. 209-11 below.

⁷¹ John B. Knipping, *Iconography of the Counter Reformation in the Netherlands, Vol. II* (Nieuwkoop: B. de Graaf, 1974), p. 303.

⁷² Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *op. cit.*, p. 200.

⁷³ *Rembrandt Research Project Vol. IV, op. cit.*, p. 11. We are told here that before this the painting was 'possibly [in the] collection of Willem Six', but no more.

⁷⁴ See Chapter Five.

of the Lord's Supper. Two pieces of evidence are adduced by supporters of this position. First, the fact that the feet of Christ and the disciples are bare might allude to the Mennonite act of foot washing at the Lord's Supper⁷⁵. Secondly, it is argued that the pre-eminence given to the breaking of bread in the painting tells us that the artist must have been a member of the Mennonite community, particularly as its members sometimes referred to communion as 'the feast of the breaking of the bread'⁷⁶. Certainly, Rembrandt did have Mennonite sympathies, particularly in the 1640s⁷⁷. But, both Visser 't Hooft and Herbert Fendrich reject these arguments as inconclusive, and I agree with them on the basis of the reasons they give⁷⁸.

All this may help the reader to see that this painting is open to a number of interpretations. I do not argue that it can be claimed for one denomination over another and that Rembrandt set out in any way to execute a systematic statement on any one particular understanding of the Lord's Supper. But, without denying the possibility of other readings, I will argue that this painting is, intentionally or unintentionally, consistent with much of what is central to Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. I do this, because my overall aim is to argue that a painting such as this could hang in a Reformed church, and it is likely that this would be acceptable to the Reformed community if the painting could be interpreted in a way which is consistent with Calvin's teachings.

⁷⁵ Timothy George, *Theology of the Reformers* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1988), p. 294.

⁷⁶ This argument is put forward by Hans Martin Rotermund and is discussed in detail by both Fendrich (*op. cit.*, p. 87), and Visser 't Hooft (*op. cit.*, pp. 23-8).

⁷⁷ Tanis, *op. cit.*, p. 392, and Rosenberg, *op. cit.*, pp. 180-4. Tanis tells us that Visser 't Hooft affirms Rembrandt's Mennonite sympathies. I disagree. Unfortunately, Tanis does not give the work by Visser 't Hooft on which he bases his contention, but in the pages of *Rembrandt and the Gospel* where he discusses Rembrandt and Mennonism (pp. 23-8), it is clear that Visser 't Hooft does not argue that Rembrandt had Mennonite sympathies.

⁷⁸ Visser 't Hooft, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-8 and 63-6, and Fendrich, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

The Calvinist understanding of Luke's account of the Supper at Emmaus and Rembrandt's religious affiliation

We will look in detail at how the painting can be read in this way shortly, but before we do this, we need to address two further issues. One of these is the extent to which Calvin and the Calvinists associated Luke's account of the Supper at Emmaus with the Lord's Supper. The other is the question of Rembrandt's own religious affiliation.

The treatment of the Supper at Emmaus by Calvin and his followers

Taking the former first, I acknowledge that my attempt to argue for a Calvinist reading of this painting may seem in the first instance to be difficult to support, not least because it is almost impossible to find any link in the Reformed tradition between the Supper at Emmaus and the Lord's Supper. This is borne out by looking both at the writings of Calvin himself and at Calvinist sources contemporary with Rembrandt.

If we begin with Calvin, we see that he goes to some length to reject any such link. In his commentary on Luke 24: 30, he opens by rejecting two readings which seem to support it. He tells us that Augustine of Hippo commented that when Christ gave the bread to the disciples, he was not offering it to them to eat, but as a symbol of his sacred body. Calvin dismisses such a reading, and, although he finds it plausible, also rejects the argument that the disciples recognized Christ in the spiritual mirror of the [Lord's] Supper. Instead, Calvin says that the disciples recognized Christ because he used a certain form of prayer with which they were familiar. I would argue that this is Calvin's own idea, as the text, which merely tells us that Christ blessed the bread, does not support such a reading. That said, Calvin does finish with an allusion to the Lord's Supper when he says, 'we learn from the Master's example, as often as we eat bread, to offer a thanksgiving to the Author of life'. But the overall intent of his

commentary on this verse is to dismiss any link between the Supper at Emmaus and the Lord's Supper⁷⁹.

If we look at statements of doctrine in use in the Dutch Reformed Church during Rembrandt's life, there is no mention of such a link in the sections of the Heidelberg Catechism that relate to the Lord's Supper⁸⁰, or for that matter in the liturgy for the Lord's Supper (*avondmaalsformulier*), developed by Petrus Dathenus⁸¹. Another place where this link might have been made is in sermons, but here again we find little evidence of it. In a sermon from 1645 by the Reformed preacher Philip van Lansberghe concerning the Lord's Supper, we find no mention of the Supper at Emmaus⁸². Perhaps more interesting is a sermon by another Reformed preacher, Johannes Beukelman (1704-57). This sermon is of particular relevance as it addresses the very verses that Rembrandt alludes to in his painting⁸³. Here, Beukelman not only rejects any connection between the Supper at Emmaus and the Lord's Supper, but he also ascribes such a reading, which he sees as erroneous, to the Roman Catholics. He writes, 'the Greek word used in the original text does not tell us that Christ said, "this

⁷⁹ CR LXXIII, CO XLV, p. 808. For an English translation, see: John Calvin, *A Harmony of the Gospels Matthew, Mark, Luke Vol. III and James and Jude*, A. W. Morrison (trans.), D. W. and T. F. Torrance (eds.) (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1972), p. 237.

⁸⁰ Sundays 28-30, questions 75-82. See: Zwanepol, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-92.

⁸¹ Petrus Dathenus, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-52.

⁸² Philip van Lansberghe, *Catechismus, ofte Onderwijsinghe inde christelijcke religie, dewelcke soo inde Nederlandtsche als Paltsche Kercken ghepredickt ende geleert wort: in LII predication seer grondich uytgheleydt ende verklaert, door Philippum Lansbergium, ... ende uyt de Latijnsche in onse Nederlandtsche tale ghetrouwelijck overgheset door Johannem Gys... t'Amstelredam, by Hendrick Laurensz. ...*, 1645, fols. 222-5. The sermon addresses questions 78 and 79 of the Heidelberg Catechism. These run 'Does the true body of Christ consist then in bread and wine?' (Dutch: *Ontstaat dan uit brood en wijn het werkelijke lichaam van Christus?*), and 'Why does Christ then call the bread his body and the cup his blood or the New Covenant in his blood, and why does Paul speak of communion with the body and blood of Christ?' (Dutch: *Waarom noemt Christus dan het brood zijn lichaam, en de beker zijn bloed of het Nieuwe Verbond in zijn bloed, en spreekt Paulus van de gemeenschap met het lichaam en bloed van Christus?*). (My translations). (See: Zwanepol, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-1).

⁸³ Although Beukelman lived in the century after Rembrandt, it is unlikely that the Calvinist understanding of this passage would have changed significantly during the intervening period.

is my body”⁸⁴. That is what the Roman exegetes contend...’ A little later, perhaps addressing those, Catholics amongst them, who argued that the practice of administering the Eucharist in one kind only gains authority from what happened at Emmaus, he says, ‘The eating of the Lord’s Supper in the one kind of bread alone, was only invented over a thousand years [after Christ]’⁸⁵.

One final piece of evidence worth considering is the poetry of the Dutch statesman and man of letters, Constantijn Huygens (1596-1687), who was well-known as a staunch Calvinist⁸⁶. Beginning in 1642, Huygens wrote some eighteen poems on the subject of the Lord’s Supper. In not one of these does he make any reference to the Supper at Emmaus⁸⁷. Of course, I recognize that this is an argument from absence and as such cannot be conclusive. However, I suggest that this together with the other evidence I have adduced leads us to the conclusion there is little or no connection in the Reformed tradition between the Lord’s Supper and the Supper at Emmaus.

Rembrandt’s own religious affiliation

Let us now turn to the second issue that we need to address before looking at Rembrandt’s *The Risen Christ at Emmaus* (1648) in detail, namely the artist’s own religious affiliation. We do this as some would argue that even if there was a link in the writings of Calvin or the Calvinists between the Supper at Emmaus and the Lord’s Supper, we should not necessarily expect to find such a link in the work of Rembrandt.

⁸⁴ Dutch: *Het Grieksche woord, dat hier in den grondtekst voorkomt, heeft niet de beteekenis als of Christus zeide: dat is mijn ligchaam; gelijk Roomsche Schrifuurverklaarders dit zoo opvatten...* (my translation). See: Johannes Beukelman, *Des Heeren verrassende genade in het openen der oogen van zijne geliefde, Jeruzalem door moedeloosheid te vroeg verlaten hebbende discipelen; mitsgaders de merkwaardige gevolgen daarvan : leerrede naar Lukas XXIV: 28-35* (Amsterdam: J. H. den Ouden, 1836), p. 12.

⁸⁵ Dutch: *Ook is het eten des Avondmaals, onder de eene gedaante van brood alleen, meer als duizend jaren daarna eerst verzonnen...* (my translation). See: Beukelman, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

⁸⁶ E. John Walford, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

⁸⁷ Constantijn Huygens, *Avondmaalsgedichten en Heilige Dagen*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8 and 41-82.

They would say that this is because Rembrandt was not an active member of the Reformed Church (*lidmaat*), but rather a mere supporter (*liefhebber*) of the church⁸⁸. This would mean, among other things, that he was not subject to the church's discipline and regulation, and perhaps more interestingly in this regard may well have been prevented from partaking in the Lord's Supper⁸⁹. They may use comparisons between Rembrandt's works, and those of one of his pupils, Jan Victors (1619-76), to strengthen their case. Victors, a staunch Calvinist, adhered more closely to Calvin's injunctions on visual art than did his master. Although he painted many Biblical scenes, he based all of these on Old Testament stories and thus avoided depicting Christ⁹⁰, something which, as we saw earlier in the chapter, would have met with Calvin's approval. This is of course in contrast to Rembrandt, who depicted Christ in

⁸⁸ Ilja Veldman is one scholar who argues that Rembrandt was a *liefhebber*. (See: Ilja Veldman, 'Protestantism and the Arts: Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century Netherlands', in: P. Corby Finney (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 397-425, at p. 409). In making this assertion, she refers to the work of Theo van Deursen. However, van Deursen says that he concludes Rembrandt was not a member of the Reformed church because he was not called before the church council with his common law wife Hendrickje, when she was ordered to present herself to it to answer the charge of 'whoredom' in 1654. However, I would suggest that this in itself is not conclusive evidence of whether or not Rembrandt was a member of the Reformed Church. Indeed, Visser 't Hooft offers another possible explanation for why only Hendrickje came before the church council. She had recently given birth to their daughter, Cornelia, and the council called for her to demand that the child be baptized. Unfortunately, no membership lists exist before 1750 in the Amsterdam Municipal archives, so we may never know if Rembrandt was a member of the Reformed church. So, at the moment we cannot come to a firm conclusion one way or the other. See: A. Th. Van Deursen, 'Rembrandt en zijn tijd: het leven van een Amsterdamse burgerman', in exhib. cat., *Rembrandt: de meester en zijn werkplaats*. *Del. 1: Schilderijen*, C. Brown et al. (eds.) (Zwolle: Waanders Uitgevers, 1991), pp. 40-49, at p. 48, and Visser 't Hooft, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-8.

⁸⁹ For a good account of the distinction between *lidmaten* and *liefhebbers*, see: Christine Kooi, *Liberty and Religion: Church and State in Leiden's Reformation, 1572-1620* (Boston: Brill, 2000), p. 53. Although, as Kooi notes, the administration of the Lord's Supper was limited in Leiden at this time to members of the church alone, I wonder if in the more liberal atmosphere of mid-seventeenth century Amsterdam, Rembrandt may have been admitted to the Lord's Supper in one of the churches there, even if he were not a member of the Reformed Church. For the institution of the distinction between *lidmaten* and *liefhebbers*, see also: Alastair Duke, 'The Ambivalent Face of Calvinism in the Netherlands', in: Menna Prestwich (ed.), *International Calvinism 1541-1715* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 109-134, at p. 125.

⁹⁰ Volker Manuth, 'Denomination and iconography: the choice of subject matter in the biblical painting of the Rembrandt circle', in: *Simiolus* 22 (1993/4), pp. 235-52, at p. 246.

many of his works.

That said, other commentators conclude that Rembrandt was a Calvinist. For example, David R. Smith writes that he concurs with W. A. Visser 't Hooft when he says that 'neither the pictures nor the documents prove [the artist Rembrandt] to have been anything but a confirmed Calvinist'⁹¹. I will not try here to determine conclusively whether or not Rembrandt was a Calvinist. This is not my purpose. Rather, what I shall do, as I do in more detail elsewhere⁹², is argue that, even though Rembrandt does not follow Calvin's directives such as his prohibition of representations of Christ, he does, intentionally or not, produce works that are consonant with themes central to the Reformer's thought⁹³. As I discuss in Chapter Two, Rembrandt's works bespeak the divine wisdom, justice and providence which are fundamental to Calvin's theology⁹⁴. Likewise, here, I intend to argue that whether he intended it or not, Rembrandt presents the story of the Supper at Emmaus, in particular in *The Risen Christ at Emmaus (1648)* (plate 8) which we will now look at in detail, in such a way as to allow us to explore and deepen our understanding of Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

⁹¹ David R. Smith, 'Towards a Protestant aesthetics: Rembrandt's 1655 Sacrifice of Isaac', in: *Art History*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (1985), pp. 290-302, at p. 291. In fact, in the pages of Visser 't Hooft's book to which Smith refers I cannot find this quote. Rather, after a survey of the possibilities for Rembrandt's religious affiliation, Visser 't Hooft says 'we must conclude from all this that Rembrandt's Christianity cannot be defined in terms of the Church, but is the result of his personal encounter with the Bible. He is not interested in systems and orthodoxies' (Visser 't Hooft, *op. cit.*, p. 70).

⁹² See my article: 'How does the Work of Rembrandt van Rijn Represent a Calvinist Aesthetic?' in: *Theology*, Jan./Feb. 2004, pp. 22-9, esp. pp. 25-8.

⁹³ Visser 't Hooft writes, 'it is not very likely that Rembrandt read Luther's or Calvin's writings, but their spirit, which lives in the Protestant translations of the Bible, made a deep and lasting impression on him' (p. 46). Another commentator suggests that life in seventeenth-century Holland was so imbued with Reformed ideas, that it is natural that an artist such as Rembrandt should produce works that reflect these. Although this may be somewhat overstating the case, there may well be some truth in it.

⁹⁴ See Chapter Two.

What Rembrandt's *The Risen Christ at Emmaus* (1648) can tell us about Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper

So let us now consider how he does this. We begin by returning to a subject that I discussed above in more general terms, namely faith⁹⁵.

Faith

I suggest that the Supper at Emmaus provides us with a metaphor for Calvin's understanding of the relationship between faith and the Lord's Supper. In the story of the Supper at Emmaus, Christ is present with the disciples regardless of whether they recognize him or not. When Christ blesses and breaks the bread, it is then, and only then, that they recognize him, and that is because they have faith. In *The Risen Christ at Emmaus* (1648), Rembrandt emphasizes this by contrasting the pronounced reaction of the disciples with the lack of reaction of the servant boy who seems to be unaware of whom he is serving⁹⁶. Likewise, in the Lord's Supper, Christ is present regardless of whether we believe it or not. However, for Calvin, we only have communion with him and receive the benefits of the Lord's Supper if we have faith⁹⁷. He writes, '[the sacraments] avail and profit nothing unless received in faith'⁹⁸.

The painting also serves to remind us that even though we are sinners, if we have faith, and are repentant, then we can partake of the Lord's Supper. The disciple on the right of the painting recalls the figure of Judas in Leonardo da Vinci's *The Last Supper*⁹⁹, and for this reason Herbert Fendrich calls him 'the archetypal sinner' (*der*

⁹⁵ See pp. 202-5 above.

⁹⁶ Fendrich, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-3.

⁹⁷ Shelton, *op. cit.*, pp. 268-9.

⁹⁸ *Institutes* IV, xiv, 17.

⁹⁹ van Regteren Altena, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

Sündersein)¹⁰⁰. However, Fendrich uses the presence of this figure to suggest that, here at least, a Lutheran reading of Rembrandt's work is more tenable than a Calvinist one¹⁰¹. He argues that for Calvin this figure would not be able to have communion with Christ, as only believers were able to do so. But, he conflates sinner with unbeliever¹⁰². He is quite right when he says that for Calvin, in contrast to Luther, unbelievers do not have communion with Christ, but the figure here is, as he himself notes, a sinner, and not an unbeliever, and for Calvin it would be perfectly acceptable for a sinner to have communion with Christ, as long as they repent.

For example, in his *Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper*, Calvin writes, 'it is a perilous mode of teaching which some adopt, when they require perfect reliance of heart and perfect penitence, and exclude all who have them not'¹⁰³. However, he does state that we must truly repent before coming to the Lord's Table¹⁰⁴, although as he himself says, we cannot expect perfect penitence. It is perhaps interesting to note that Rembrandt represents Judas as a repentant sinner elsewhere, for example in *The Repentant Judas returning the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and elders (1629)*¹⁰⁵, and it is as a believer repentant of his sins, rather than as an unbeliever, that we should understand this disciple: someone who is made aware of his own sin by Christ's presence and is

¹⁰⁰ Fendrich, *op. cit.*, p. 67-8.

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p. 68, esp. n. 285, and p. 89.

¹⁰² This conflation is evident when he writes, 'The question, as to whether Christ is also really present for the unbelievers or unworthy in the elements of the Eucharist, was an essential point for the theological disputes within the reforming churches'. German: ... die Frage, ob Christus auch für den Ungläubigen oder Unwürdigen in den Abendmahlsgestalten wirklich gegenwärtig ist, für die theologischen Auseinandersetzungen innerhalb der reformatorischen Kirchen ein wesentlicher Punkt war. (My translation and my use of standard font for the words 'unbelievers' and 'unworthy'). (Fendrich, p. 68).

¹⁰³ John Calvin, 'Short Treatise on the Lord's Supper', in: H. Beveridge (trans.), *Treatises on the Sacraments* (Fearn, Ross-shire: Christian Heritage, 2002), pp. 163-198, at p. 177.

¹⁰⁴ Alexander Barclay, *The Protestant Doctrine of the Lord's Supper* (Glasgow: Jackson, Wylie & Co., 1927), p. 219.

¹⁰⁵ Schwartz, *op. cit.*, p. 75 (Bredius-Gerson 539A).

now seeking forgiveness. I wonder finally whether this figure is somewhat autobiographical: Rembrandt, the repentant sinner asking for forgiveness as he comes before Christ.

Turning briefly to the other disciple, one may read his reaction as one of thanksgiving, subsequent to that of the archetypal sinner to his right¹⁰⁶. He is giving thanks to the Lord for the forgiveness of sins. Thanksgiving is central to many accounts of the sacrament, not least that of Calvin. As well as giving thanks for the forgiveness of sins, he urges us to show our gratitude for the gift of the Lord's Supper freely given, and for the fact that Christ surrendered his life for all mankind¹⁰⁷.

The location of Christ

Having considered the disciples, let us now turn to the figure of Christ. In Calvin's account of the Lord's Supper, the most important point to remember is that Christ's ascension was a physical, historical event and that he is now seated at the right hand of the Father¹⁰⁸. By contrast, we who partake of the Lord's Supper are firmly rooted on earth. Yet, by the work of the Holy Spirit, we are united with Christ's flesh and blood in the *sursum corda*¹⁰⁹. Exactly how this happens is, Calvin admits, a mystery beyond his understanding, but for him the fact remains that it does take place¹¹⁰: for him, we who are on earth are joined to Christ, who is in heaven. It may seem that this fundamental tenet of Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper is not well illustrated by Rembrandt's *The Risen Christ at Emmaus* (1648), particularly as this scene seems at

¹⁰⁶ Fendrich, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁷ B. A. Gerrish, *The Old Protestantism and the New: Essays on the Reformation Heritage* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1982), pp. 114-5.

¹⁰⁸ *Institutes* II, xvi, 14 and 15, and IV, xvii, 19.

¹⁰⁹ *Institutes* IV, xvii, 31.

¹¹⁰ See notes 119 and 120 below.

first sight to be firmly located on earth. But, what I will argue is that the painting allows us to reflect on the basic tensio

of Calvin's doctrine, and, further, that through the use of symbol and allusion it provides us with imaginative ways in which to re-conceive the relationship between these two poles.

In the painting, we see Christ at the Supper at Emmaus with his disciples firmly situated on earth¹¹¹. Yet, there are already allusions to heaven, to where Christ is about to depart. We see this in the high alcove above Christ's head, the fact that his eyes look heavenwards and the fact that the colour of his cloak is light gold, a colour traditionally associated with heaven in art¹¹². In fact, Rembrandt uses a range of light gold tones throughout this painting, which, as one commentator notes, 'give the [whole] picture the appearance of the heavenly and the magical'¹¹³. Close to gold as a symbolic colour is white, and the white of the tablecloth in the painting may remind us of heaven. This idea is strengthened when we remember that white is the colour of theophany and transfiguration (Mark 9: 3)¹¹⁴ and as such alludes to heaven. But, of course, theophany and transfiguration are also means of divine revelation on earth, and so there is a sense in which the painting points us back to this world, one which is emphasized by the tablecloth itself, as it is clearly suggestive of a dressed communion table¹¹⁵. This, together with the architecture in the painting, may lead us to agree with Rudolf Obermüller when he says that here we are on earth at a 'church celebration'

¹¹¹ See p. 205 above, where I compare Rembrandt's depiction of Christ with that of Jan Steen in his work *Christ at Emmaus*. Whereas Rembrandt gives full bodily form to Christ, Steen depicts him as if he were a phantom, or even the object of the somnolent disciples' dreams.

¹¹² See pp. 194-5 and 205 above.

¹¹³ Joseph Gantner, *Rembrandt und die Verwandlung klassischer Formen* (Munich: 1964), p. 140, n. 51 (my translation).

¹¹⁴ Fendrich, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

¹¹⁵ Fendrich, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

(*kirchliche Feier*)¹¹⁶.

So, here we begin to see a tension between heaven and earth in this picture, similar to that which we find in Calvin's account of the Lord's Supper. But, what we also see are possible ways in which we might re-imagine this polarity, as certain features in the painting point to both heaven and earth. If we look again at Calvin's account, we see that the elements of the Lord's Supper, the bread and the wine, are not mere reminders of a past event, which is how his fellow Reformer, Zwingli, seems to have understood them¹¹⁷, but rather the means through which we are brought together with what they represent, i.e. the flesh and blood of Christ¹¹⁸. This may seem to directly contradict the notion that Christ remains in heaven and we on earth, but, as I note above, for Calvin this is made possible by the work of the Holy Spirit¹¹⁹, although, again, he admits that he does not know how this is achieved¹²⁰. I suggest that in *The Risen Christ at Emmaus* (1648), Rembrandt provides us with a way of thinking about this by using the symbol of light, particularly that which falls from the window out of sight to the left of the picture, to allude to the Holy Spirit¹²¹. It is true that light is sometimes used as a metaphor for God the Father. However, Calvin himself also uses it as a metaphor for

¹¹⁶ Rudolf Obermüller, 'Rembrandts Werk und das Problem der Christlichen Kunst' in: *Monatschrift für Gottesdienst und kirchliche Kunst* 1933:1, pp. 10-28, at p. 14.

¹¹⁷ Gerrish, 'Calvin, John' in: *OCCT*, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

¹¹⁸ *ibid.* Gerrish sums this up well when he says, 'The sign (i.e. the bread and wine) presents what it represents'.

¹¹⁹ In a letter to Heinrich Bullinger in 1562, Calvin writes, 'Christ, by the unfathomable and ubiquitous power of his Spirit...makes himself ours that he dwells in us without changing place' (Reumann, *op. cit.*, p. 69). See also: *Institutes* IV, xvii, 31, and IV, xvii, 10.

¹²⁰ *Institutes* IV, xvii, 32. This runs: 'Now, if anyone should ask me how this takes place, I shall not be ashamed to confess it is a secret too lofty for either my mind to comprehend or my words to declare. And, to speak more plainly, I rather experience than understand it'. See also: *Institutes* IV, xvii, 10.

¹²¹ The Rembrandt Research Project suggests that the proportions of the painting are unusual for its time and that it may originally have been broader. It would have included an area to the left, subsequently removed, which may well have depicted a window. (*Rembrandt Research Project*, *op. cit.*, pp. 8-9.)

the Holy Spirit. For example, in *Institutes IV*, xiv, 8, he writes, '...[the Lord] illumines our minds by the light of his Holy Spirit' and in paragraph nine of the same chapter he writes, '...what sight does in our eyes for seeing light[is] analogous to the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts'. J. Q. van Regteren Altena argues that in earlier depictions of the Supper at Emmaus, 'spirit itself was evoked by Rembrandt by the image of light'¹²². And it seems that here again in his 1648 painting, Rembrandt uses light to evoke the Holy Spirit¹²³. This use of light allows us to reflect on how two places which we conceive of as spatially distinct may be held together¹²⁴. That said, despite Calvin's assertion that we who are on earth are joined to Christ who is in heaven through the work of the Holy Spirit, there does still seem to be a residual tension in his account of the Lord's Supper, which he himself acknowledges, and I suggest that we find further echoes of this tension¹²⁵ in Rembrandt's 1648 painting. But, I also suggest that the fact the Rembrandt manages to juxtapose so many allusions to heaven and earth on the same canvas again, as in the case of light just discussed, affords us the opportunity to reflect on the nature of this tension and imaginative ways in which we can engage with it and express it.

Further ways in which Rembrandt depicts the tension between heaven and earth

First, he represents this tension formally by using both symmetry and asymmetry in the

¹²² van Regteren Altena, *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹²³ For a fuller discussion of light in this picture, see Fendrich, *op. cit.*, pp. 49-50. We also see the use of light to represent the Holy Spirit in other works of art, such as those depicting the annunciation. For example, in Fra Angelico's *The Annunciation* (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid), we see the Holy Spirit as a dove coming down to Mary in a stream of light.

¹²⁴ I wonder if this also asks us to re-consider our understanding of heaven and earth as entities that are spatially entirely distinct. This would be a fruitful avenue for further investigation. See also Chapter Four, where I argue that Calvin's understanding of God's relationship to created space is more nuanced than some commentators would have us believe.

¹²⁵ *Institutes IV*, xvii, 19 and *IV*, xvii, 32.

picture¹²⁶. Wolfgang Stechow notes that Christ is depicted centrally between the two disciples¹²⁷. His head is also exactly on the central axis of the alcove. Such symmetry is for Fendrich a symbol of 'a divine order and beauty beyond this world'¹²⁸. However, as Stechow also points out, Christ does not sit on the central axis of the whole picture¹²⁹. Further, the symmetry of the group of Christ and the disciples is broken by the servant to Christ's left. Such asymmetry is symbolic of the earthly world¹³⁰. As Fendrich writes, 'there is an overwhelming impression of a symmetrical order in the picture, which is however never completely carried through, but always...nuanced by deviations (*Abweichungen*) and distortions (*Verschiebungen*)'.¹³¹

Secondly, the tension between heaven and earth, with which this picture is suffused, is also reflected in the form of the picture itself. As Fendrich points out, the main scene in the picture covers barely a third of the total surface area of the painting. For him, this emphasizes the fact that the scene takes place in another sphere of existence (*Daseinsphäre*)¹³². This said, we have a completely natural scene. We have a completely human world with human relations. For example, the scale of the figures does not in any way bespeak heaven, in contrast to that used by Rubens in many of his depictions of Christ¹³³.

Thirdly, the tension between heaven and earth is also reflected in the depiction of the alcove behind Christ. In one sense, it suggests that the setting for the scene is a

¹²⁶ Rembrandt Research Project, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

¹²⁷ Wolfgang Stechow, 'Rembrandts Darstellungen des Emmausmahles', in: *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte Vol. 3 (1934)*, pp. 329-341, at p. 338.

¹²⁸ Fendrich, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

¹²⁹ Stechow, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

¹³⁰ Fendrich, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

¹³¹ *ibid.*, p. 46. (My translation).

¹³² *ibid.*, p. 44.

¹³³ See p. 195 above.

church. Here, I wonder if the idea, which Erasmus discusses in his Paraphrase on Luke 11-24¹³⁴, that it was only in the house that the disciples recognized Christ and that this therefore stands for the church, was in Rembrandt's mind as he painted *The Risen Christ at Emmaus*. But, the height of the alcove also points us to heaven and alludes to Christ's imminent departure from earth.

Finally, the tension between heaven and earth in Calvin's account of the Lord's Supper is mirrored in the use of colour by Rembrandt in his work. But here, I wonder if we see not only tension, but also a symbolic way of holding together the poles of heaven and earth. There is a clear use of light gold bespeaking heaven, and a clear use of darker brown tones, particularly on the coat of the disciple on the left, which allude to earth¹³⁵. But there is also an unbroken range of colours in the painting which moves from gold to brown and makes these part of a continuum as well as affirming their distinctiveness. This, I suggest, is how Calvin would like us to think of the Lord's Supper, as a place where we affirm the distinctiveness of Christ's space and our own, but also one where we can be joined with him through the work of the Holy Spirit.

This is perhaps a good point at which to sum up what we have learnt so far in this part of the chapter, before moving on to our final section. We have seen that Rembrandt's work deals with questions of faith, thanksgiving, sin and forgiveness, and the tension between heaven and earth, which are all themes in Calvin's account of the Lord's Supper, and what we have recognized in particular is that in *The Risen Christ at Emmaus* (1648), Rembrandt deals with these matters in a manner which allows us to deepen our understanding of Calvin's account of this sacrament. With this in mind, let

¹³⁴ Desiderius Erasmus, *Paraphrase on Luke 11-24*, Jane E. Phillips (trans. and ed.) (London: University of Toronto Press, 2003), p. 271.

¹³⁵ Fendrich, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

us now turn briefly to three final themes that Rembrandt's depiction of the Supper at Emmaus allows us to explore.

First, I mentioned above that Rembrandt's depiction of the Supper at Emmaus provides us with a metaphor for Calvin's understanding of the relationship between faith and the Lord's Supper¹³⁶. Another point I want to make is that it also provides us with a metaphor for Calvin's assertion that the Lord's Supper acts as a pledge or an assurance of God's love for us and his promises to us.

Christ appears to the disciples at Emmaus and again in the accounts of John Chs. 20 and 21. In doing so, he provides them with the assurance that, as Matthew records, 'I am with you always, to the end of the age' (28: 20). Likewise, for Calvin, the Lord's Supper is God's way of providing us with the assurance of his promises to us¹³⁷. Again, whether Rembrandt had such a reading in mind, we do not know, but it was no doubt heartening for him to know that although Christ had ascended to heaven, he would still be with his people, including Rembrandt.

Secondly, I mentioned a moment ago that one reading of this painting is that the scene it depicts is set in a church. Let us suppose that this is so, for if it is, then we find further resonances between the painting and Calvin's understanding of the Lord's Supper. Calvin was adamant that the Lord's Supper should be celebrated in a church building. This was, above all, to ensure that it was correctly administered according to Christ's institution¹³⁸. But, there is also a sense in which the Lord's Supper is a corporate act of worship¹³⁹: it can never be an individual experience. This is reflected

¹³⁶ See p. 214 above.

¹³⁷ *Institutes* IV, xiv, 3.

¹³⁸ *Institutes* IV, i, 9. See also Chapter Four.

¹³⁹ Shelton, *op. cit.*, p. 269.

by setting the scene in what looks like a church, the locus of communal worship, and in the presence of the two disciples who are united to Christ formally in the picture¹⁴⁰.

Thirdly, let us look again at the servant boy, and consider what it is that he is carrying to the table. One commentator argues it is far-fetched to suggest that he is carrying a lamb's skull and that this alludes to Christ as the sacrificial lamb¹⁴¹. It is not clear exactly whom the commentator is accusing of putting forward this idea, but one writer who does suggest it is Jacques Foucart¹⁴². I think this is a valuable idea, but suggest that it can be developed further. I have already noted that the servant boy does not recognize that his guest is the risen Christ. I wonder if the lamb's skull, if that it is, alludes to the fact that the servant boy still considers Christ to be dead and that it is for this reason he does not recognize the true identity of his guest. Rembrandt may be reminding us that to have true faith we must believe in the risen Christ.

Conclusion

So, in conclusion, I have tried to show that Rembrandt's *The Risen Christ at Emmaus* (1648) provides us with an opportunity to deepen our understanding of John Calvin's account of the Lord's Supper. I have left open the question of whether this was Rembrandt's intention and have tried to make clear that I recognize that this is only one of several possible readings. My overall aim is to argue that it would be appropriate to hang this painting in a Reformed Church and that it has a value that is not only aesthetic, but also epistemological. In both of these particulars, I believe we have made some progress. Admittedly, questions remain unanswered. Perhaps the

¹⁴⁰ See pp. 205-6 above.

¹⁴¹ *Rembrandt Research Project, op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁴² Jacques Foucart, *Les peintures de Rembrandt du Louvre* (Paris: Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1982), p. 50.

most important of these is that if Rembrandt had wanted us to read his picture as a statement on the Lord's Supper, why does it contain no prominent reference to wine, as we see for example in Caravaggio's depictions of the story, or in that of Jan Steen¹⁴³. In Rembrandt's picture, there is a small glass on the table by Christ's right elbow, but this is not prominent and certainly contains no red wine, which one usually associates with the Lord's Supper. Maybe, it is simply because no wine is mentioned by Luke. Again, we can only surmise. But, I hope I have shown the reader that the opinion that there is no connection between this painting and the Lord's Supper does not hold much weight¹⁴⁴. Christian Tümpel writes, 'although the picture does not explicitly refer to the Lord's Supper, it nevertheless makes us think of it'. I agree, but would add that when we think of it, we begin to see parallels which allow us to deepen our understanding of the sacrament and also of the Supper at Emmaus¹⁴⁵.

One way of describing what we have done in this chapter is to say that we have considered how a work of visual art can help to deepen our understanding of the first book of God's revelation, Scripture, although of course in describing Calvin's account of the Lord's Supper, we have more than just this. In a similar vein, in the next chapter, I will look at the work of Rembrandt's fellow Dutchman, Jacob van Ruisdael, to see how his landscape paintings, and in particular his work, *Het Korenveld* ('The Wheatfield') (c. 1660), can help to deepen our understanding of the second book of God's revelation, creation. Here, we will see that as well as doing this, van Ruisdael's work also allows us to consider further arguments for the placing of appropriate works of art in churches in the Reformed tradition.

¹⁴³ In Steen's *Christ at Emmaus*, we can see a grapevine climbing the arbour above the apostles' heads

¹⁴⁴ This opinion is put forward in: *Rembrandt Research Project*, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁵ Quotation from a private letter to me from Professor Tümpel.

Chapter Seven: Jacob van Ruisdael's landscape paintings: a place where man encounters God's activity in the world

Introduction

In the last chapter, I looked at how the work of Rembrandt van Rijn allows us to deepen our understanding of John Calvin's account of the Lord's Supper. I did this by considering Rembrandt's depictions of the Supper at Emmaus in works of art that may be described as histories. In this chapter, I will look at the work of another great Dutch artist, Jacob van Ruisdael (1628/9-1682)¹, in order to investigate whether his landscape paintings afford us a similar opportunity to discuss and deepen our understanding of Calvin's thought. In Chapter One, I noted that Calvin does not affirm landscape painting in the way that he does history painting. However, I argued that this was in part due to the fact that during his lifetime, landscape had not yet asserted itself as a subject in art in its own right. But, I went on to say that landscape painting does conform to Calvin's requirement that only what is visible may be depicted in art², and stated that landscape paintings such as those of van Ruisdael have an epistemological value which provides further support for their use within Reformed churches³. In this chapter, I will develop

¹ The reader will note that the artist's name is sometimes spelt with an 'i', sometimes with a 'y'. Although a 'y' was used in the spelling of the name of Jacob's father, Isaack, and for other members of the family, such as his uncle, Salomon, E. John Walford notes that Jacob wrote the family name with an 'i', not a 'y'. That said, his contemporaries invariably wrote his name with a 'y'. I follow the practice of the artist and of most modern commentators in using an 'i', although I retain a 'y' when quoting directly from those commentators who used 'y'. See: Walford, *op. cit.*, p. 8. See also: H. F. Wijnman, 'Het Leven der Ruysdaels I', in: *Oud Holland* 49, 1932, pp. 49-60 for a history of the name and the spelling of the names of the main members of the family.

² *Institutes* I, xi, 12.

³ See Chapter One, pp. 24-27.

this last point further and argue that paintings such as van Ruisdael's *Het Korenveld* ('The Wheatfield') (c. 1660) (plate 14)⁴, which I will look at in detail, provide an opportunity to reflect upon the encounter between God and man in the created order, and thus help to deepen our knowledge of how God acts in the world, of ourselves, and of the rest of creation⁵.

Challenges to the understanding of the world in seventeenth-century Europe

Van Ruisdael was born into a world of great change and during his lifetime ideas which had long been held about the relationship between God and his creation, including man, were being radically challenged. This was in large measure due to the impact of new ways of seeing, which themselves were a consequence of advances in mathematics and science⁶. Developments in the theory of light, the science of optics and the production and use of lenses were to have radical implications for the understanding of the cosmos and of things

⁴ The painting under discussion hangs in the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, Rotterdam and is inventory number 1742. There it is called *Het Korenveld*, a name which, according to R. H. Fuchs, it was only given in the nineteenth century. H. Gerson also uses this name, but other commentators give it other names. For example, Seymour Slive calls it *Sunlit Grainfield on the Bank of a Coast* and similarly Karsten Müller calls it *Een korenveld nabij de kust* ('A wheatfield by the coast'). I use the name *Het Korenveld*, but the reader should be aware that other commentators give it other names. See: R. H. Fuchs, 'Over het landschap. Een verslag naar aanleiding van Jacob van Ruisdael, *Het Korenveld*', in: *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 86, 1973, pp. 281-292; Gerson, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-21b; Slive (2001), *op. cit.*, p. 128; Karsten Müller, 'Jacob van Ruisdael, *Een korenveld nabij de kust*', in: Martina Sitt, Pieter Biesboer et al. (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 118-9.

⁵ Compare *Institutes* I, i, 1: 'Nearly all the wisdom we possess, that is to say, true and sound wisdom, consists of two parts: the knowledge of God and of ourselves'.

⁶ Denis Cosgrove describes landscape as a *new way of seeing* in his article, 'Prospect, perspective and the evolution of the landscape idea' in: *Transactions, Institute of British Geographers, New Series, Vol. 10, 1985*, pp. 45-62. At note 10, Cosgrove acknowledges that he takes this phrase from John Berger's book *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972). For an account of the way in which medieval ideas about vision affected how people viewed images, see my article: 'The extent to which the rise in the worship of images in the late Middle Ages was influenced by contemporary theories of vision' in: *The Scottish Journal of Theology* (forthcoming).

which are either too distant or too small for the naked eye to perceive, and it is interesting to note that the Netherlands were at the forefront of these advances⁷. The invention of the telescope owes much to Dutch instrument makers such as Zacharias Jansen (c. 1580-after 1628) and Hans Lipperhey (d. 1619), but it was the Pisan-born polymath Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) whose improvements to it allowed him to see heavenly bodies invisible to the naked eye, such as the four 'Medici' satellites of Jupiter. Further, Galileo was able to confirm Copernicus' theory that the cosmos, or at least our part of it, the solar system, was heliocentric and not geocentric, as had previously been believed⁸.

At the other end of the scale, there was an increasing interest in the microscopic world. Advances in the making and use of lenses, which eventually led to the discovery of bacteria by another Dutchman, Antoni van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1723), allowed those interested in botany to closely observe and categorize members of the plant kingdom. At the *Hortus Botanicus* in Leiden, Carolus Clusius (1526-1609) was one of the first people to categorize plants according to their physical properties and not their use⁹. New ways of looking at nature were also reflected in art. Indeed, some argue that Jacob van Ruisdael himself, who probably had no formal training in botany¹⁰, may rightly be called the 'father

⁷ Denis Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), pp. 152-3.

⁸ Dirk J. Struik, *The Land of Stevin and Huygens: A Sketch of Science and Technology in the Dutch Republic during the Golden Century* (London: D. Reidel, 1981), pp. 49-50.

⁹ de Klijn, *op. cit.*, p. 20, and Struik, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-2.

¹⁰ Struik notes that the new universities in the United Provinces were mainly schools for training Reformed ministers and that most new discoveries in the country took place outside the schools (Struik, *op. cit.*, pp. 102-3). That said, Clusius, mentioned above, was professor of botany appointed in the early days of Leiden University (Struik, pp. 111-2). There is a theory that later in his life, in about 1676, van Ruisdael took a medical degree at the University of Caen in northern France, but this is inadequately

of tree illustration', as his depictions of the distinguishing features of trees allow botanists to identify them to the level of genus¹¹. But this is not all, for just as these new ways of seeing challenged existing ideas about the natural world, so too ideas based on Aristotelian philosophy which had long been held by the Church about how God interacts with his creation were now being contested.

According to these ideas, God generally acted in the world not directly, but indirectly, through the elements of his creation such as humans, or natural phenomena¹². Although God, as *primary cause*, created these elements, or *secondary causes*, there is a sense in which they were considered to act independently of him, in accordance with pre-defined internal tendencies which led them towards a certain end or goal¹³. For Reformers such as Calvin¹⁴ and his followers, this independence was seen to stand in direct opposition to God's sovereignty, and so they placed particular emphasis in their writings on the idea that nothing could act outside his will.

This led some, often referred to as mechanists, to think that the world was governed by a set of divine, immutable laws, a position that resolved into deism. Whilst not denying that

supported. See: Peter Ashton et al., 'Jacob van Ruisdael's Trees', in: *Arnoldia: A continuation of the Bulletin of popular information of the Arnold Arboretum, Harvard University* 42, 1982, pp. 2-31, at p. 6.

¹¹ Ashton et al., *op. cit.*, p. 5.

¹² Alister McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), p. 277. Those times at which God did act directly were often seen as miracles. See also: Rienk Vermij, 'Science and Belief in Dutch History' in: Klaas van Berkel et al. (eds.), *A History of Science in the Netherlands: Survey, Themes and Reference* (Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 332-47, at pp. 338-9.

¹³ Gary B. Deason, 'Reformation Theology and the Mechanistic Conception of Nature' in: David C. Lindberg and Ronald L. Numbers (eds.), *God and Nature: Historical Essays on the Encounter between Christianity and Science* (London: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 167-191, at p. 168.

¹⁴ *Institutes* I, xvi, 4 ff.

the world moved in accordance with such laws, Calvin and his successors¹⁵ also asserted that God continued to act in the world, not through created objects, but through his Word¹⁶. This view of how God interacts with creation was known as special providence and is of particular interest here as it asserted that God intervened in the world at the level of the individual¹⁷.

This divine concern for the individual might lead us to expect that in works consonant with Reformed theology, which as I argue below include those of Jacob van Ruisdael, we should see prominent human figures whose individual features are clearly depicted. This we do not see, but this does not mean that the person is absent from his paintings, for these works are clearly the product of the artist's own, subjective response to the environment. This subjectivity manifests itself in a number of ways. First, van Ruisdael depicts the areas we see in his paintings from his own view point. In common with other painters of his time, van Ruisdael used a technique, which, like the telescope and the microscope we discussed above, radically changed the way people saw the world: linear perspective. This technique, which owes much to the work of fifteenth-century Italian

¹⁵ See for example the answer to question 27 of the 10th Sunday of the Heidelberg Catechism: 'What do you understand by the providence of God?' (Dutch: *Wat verstaat gij onder de voorzienigheid van God?*) in: Zwanepol, *op. cit.*, p. 80. (My translation).

¹⁶ Deason, *op. cit.*, pp. 170, and 175-8. I should note that Susan Schreiner points to several passages in Calvin's writings where he still seems to see a role for secondary causality. However, she seems to agree with Deason that the overall tenor of Calvin's work is to reject this idea. Her position is best summed by her conclusion to the section on this subject: 'Calvin's world was simply too dangerous a place to leave it to the realm of secondary causation. It needed God'. Schreiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-32.

¹⁷ Deason, *op. cit.*, pp. 167, and 186-88, and Schreiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-32.

artists such as Filippo Brunelleschi (1377-1446)¹⁸ and Tommaso Masaccio (1401-1428?)¹⁹, allowed for the portrayal of a three-dimensional space on two-dimensional canvas. Although it helped artists to provide more realistic representations of the world than had hitherto been possible, this technique also gave the artist, or the viewer, a sense of power or control over the area depicted²⁰. I do not suggest that van Ruisdael himself would have had this uppermost in his mind, but he may well have painted scenes such as *Het Korenveld* for patrons who wanted to have a permanent record of the land they owned. Indeed, the rise in the use of linear perspective in landscape painting parallels the increasing desire to control the land and make it as economically productive as possible, not only in the countries of Western Europe such as the United Provinces, but also overseas. For example, to the north, the Dutch set up a whaling 'factory' on the shores of Spitsbergen²¹, to the west they set up the colony of New Netherland on the banks of the Hudson River²², to the south they established the colonies of Netherlands Brazil and Cape Colony and to the east they set up trading posts and populated lands surrounding the

¹⁸ For a fine account of the sources of those artists such as Brunelleschi, who along with architects such as Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72), developed the use of linear perspective during the fifteenth century, see: David Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 148 ff. See also my forthcoming article, 'The extent to which the rise in the worship of images in the late Middle Ages was influenced by contemporary theories of vision', *op. cit.*, pp. 2-5.

¹⁹ For an account of Masaccio's use of perspective in his *Trinity with the Virgin and St. John*, in Santa Maria Novella, Florence, see: Jane Andrews Aiken, 'The Perspective Construction of Masaccio's *Trinity* Fresco and Medieval Astronomical Graphics', in: Rona Goffen (ed.), *Masaccio's Trinity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), pp. 90-107. It should be noted, however, that, as David Brown points out, the figure of God the Father stands outside the frame of perspective to which the other figures in this painting are subject. See: David Brown, 'The Trinity in Art', *op. cit.*, p. 345.

²⁰ Compare Cosgrove (1985), *op. cit.*, p. 46.

²¹ K. H. D. Haley, *The Dutch in the Seventeenth Century* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1972), pp. 16-17 and 28.

²² *ibid.*, pp. 27-8, and Israel, *op. cit.*, pp. 766 and 934.

Indian Ocean²³. Indeed, some commentators see van Ruisdael's work primarily as a reflection of the increased prosperity of the newly independent United Provinces in the mid-seventeenth century²⁴.

The sense in which artists such as van Ruisdael exercise subjective control over their environment is also reflected in the fact that they would make choices about what to include in a picture and what to exclude from it. It is unlikely that van Ruisdael himself painted many, if any, scenes on location. Rather, he would select motives from his sketchbooks or his mind and use these to create the desired landscape²⁵. But, although we again speak of control here, we also find what is perhaps van Ruisdael's most important contribution to the engagement of Reformed theology with the arts. For whilst providing us with landscapes which are consonant with Reformed theology, he also engages his imagination²⁶, or to use the Dutch term, paints *uyt den gheest*²⁷. We see this in many of his works such as *Het Korenveld*, although it is perhaps most evident in paintings such as *The Jewish Cemetery*²⁸ and *View of Bentheim Castle*²⁹, which are based on known locations, but whose features have been modified by the artist to communicate something

²³ Israel, *op. cit.*, pp. 934-8.

²⁴ See for example: E. Haverkamp Begemann and A. Chong, 'Dutch landscape painting and its associations', in: H. R. Hoetink (ed.), M. Hoyle (trans.), *The Royal Picture Gallery Mauritshuis* (Amsterdam: Meulenhoff/Landshoff, 1985), pp. 56-67.

²⁵ For an excellent discussion of this process, see: E. John Walford, *op. cit.*, pp. 20 and 28. Walford refers to the process as 'selective naturalness'.

²⁶ For a fine description of how van Ruisdael engages his imagination in his work, see: H. Gerson, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-21b.

²⁷ We see an example of the use of this term in the description of the work of the Dutch historical and landscape artist, Abraham Bloemaert (1564-1651). See: http://www.dbnl.org/tekst/mand001schi01_01_mand001schi01_01_0271.htm.

²⁸ Slive (2001), *op. cit.*, pp. 179-185.

²⁹ van Ruisdael painted this scene on several occasions. See: Slive (2001), *op. cit.*, pp. 22-41.

of how he felt about the scene³⁰. It is well known that John Calvin did not value the imagination, seeing it as the source of fantasies that gives us no true knowledge³¹. For this reason, he considered that it should be suppressed. But, what van Ruisdael offers us is the opportunity to reflect on how the imagination can engage with the arts, and in particular the visual arts. Further, he does this in a manner which, far from being dangerous, allows us to engage with and deepen our understanding of ideas central to Reformed theology.

Jacob van Ruisdael - a short biography

This should not surprise us if we consider some of the details of his life, although in saying this I am in no way rejecting the idea that a work of art can be read in a manner which does not reflect the beliefs or intentions of the artist³².

At the age of twenty-nine, in 1657, van Ruisdael was baptized into the Reformed Church at Ankeveen, a small village near Amsterdam³³. As John Walford notes, he was by no

³⁰ I have visited the Jewish cemetery at Ouderkerk aan der Amstel and it and the surrounding area are completely flat. This is after all North Holland. So the hill to the left of the picture and the change in the height of the river bed which allows van Ruisdael to depict water rushing down are the result of the artist's imaginative engagement with his subject. See: George S. Keyes et al., *Masters of Dutch Painting: The Detroit Institute of Arts* (London: Giles, 2004), pp. 198-9. Regarding the view of Bentheim Castle, David Brown writes, 'Ruisdael himself...made the setting of [the] Castle far more majestic than it really is, for both aesthetic and religious purposes'. See: Brown (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 406.

³¹ William A. Dyrness, *Reformed Theology and Visual Culture: The Protestant Imagination from Calvin to Edwards* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), pp. 64-5, and William J. Bouwsma, *Calvin: A Sixteenth Century Portrait* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), p. 80.

³² For a recent account of intention in art, see: Paisley Livingston, *Art and Intention: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

³³ This assertion is based on two entries in the Amsterdam Church Council Protocol and one in the book of baptisms at Ankeveen, where van Ruisdael was baptised. The first entry in the Amsterdam Church Council Protocol of the Reformed Church tells us that on 14th June, 1657, Jacob van Ruisdael, having confessed his faith, sought a 'Christian baptism'. (See: The Amsterdam Church Council Protocol part 9, fol. 207. This is to be found in the Amsterdam Municipal Archives. This document is extremely difficult to read, but H. F. Wijnman gives what seems to be a reliable transcription in: Wijnman, 'Het Leven der Ruysdaels II' in: *Oud Holland* 49, 1932, pp. 173-181, at p. 176). Three days later, on 17th June, 1657,

means obliged to take this step and it would certainly not have been necessary for him to do so in order to participate in the establishment or to procure commissions³⁴. I suggest he did not make this decision summarily but may well have attended Reformed Church services as a *liefhebber* ('supporter')³⁵ for several years before being baptized³⁶. Further, there is nothing to suggest that he left the Church between this time and his death in 1682. Apart from these facts, what we know of van Ruisdael's early life also allows us to conclude that we should be able to read his work in a manner consonant with Reformed theology.

He was born sometime between June 1628 and June 1629 in Haarlem, North Holland³⁷. H. F. Wijnman states that it is *aannemelijk* ('plausible' or 'reasonable') that Jacob's father, Isaack Jacobsz. van Ruysdael (1599-1677) belonged to the Mennonite community and there is little doubt that his uncle and fellow landscape artist, Salomon Jacobsz. van

van Ruisdael was baptised in Ankeveen. (See: H. F. Wijnman, p. 178. Here, Wijnman also discusses possible reasons why van Ruisdael might have been baptised in Ankeveen, instead of Amsterdam, where he was living at the time. It is worth noting the difficulty Wijnman had in deciphering the entry for van Ruisdael's baptism in the Ankeveen book of baptisms). The second entry in the Amsterdam Church Council Protocol confirms this, telling us on 21st June, 1657, 'Jacob van Ruysdael ... after he had confessed his belief in front of us, was baptized in An(c)keveen on 17th June'. (See: The Amsterdam Church Council Protocol part 9, fol. 208. (My translation). See also: H. F. Wijnman, *op. cit.*, p. 176 for a reliable transcription).

³⁴ Walford, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

³⁵ Christine Kooi provides a useful discussion of the difference between a *liefhebber* and a *lidmaat* ('member'). She defines *liefhebbers* as 'sympathizers [who] regularly attended sermons but had not yet taken that final step into the household of faith'. I argue that this may describe van Ruisdael before his baptism into the Reformed Church. On 14th June, 1657, van Ruisdael professed his faith, and thus became a *lidmaat*, defined by Kooi as an individual 'who had formally and publicly professed [his/her] belief'. See Christine Kooi, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

³⁶ See also: Brown (2004), *op. cit.*, p. 406 for a similar assertion.

³⁷ For uncertainty over the date of van Ruisdael's birth, see H. F. Wijnman, 'Het Leven der Ruysdaels I', *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9, and 'Het Leven der Ruysdaels II', *op. cit.*, at p. 173.

Ruysdael (1600/1603-70), was a member of the Flemish community of Mennonites in Haarlem³⁸. This does not mean, as Huigen Leeftang seems to assert, that Jacob himself was a necessarily an active member of the Mennonite community³⁹, but rather that, as Wijnman concludes, he 'came out of the Mennonite circle'⁴⁰. Although the Mennonites and Calvinists differed on various matters, these did not include their understanding of God as creator and sustainer of the world⁴¹. Further, landscape paintings by artists known to be Mennonites, such as those by Jacob's uncle Salomon and those by the artist and art theorist, Carel van Mander (1548-1606) do not portray any features that distinguish them from works by their Calvinist contemporaries⁴².

So, although Jacob van Ruysdael may well have been influenced by Mennonite ideas early in his life, those ideas relating to creation and providence were not at odds with the

³⁸ H.F. Wijnman, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60. Wijnman notes that there is no mention of the name of Jacob's father Isaack in a list of members of the United Flemish, High-German and Fresian Community of Mennonites, produced in 1669, although this list does include the name of Jacob's uncle, Salomon.

³⁹ Leeftang writes that the Mennonite teacher Jan van Westerhoven was 'probably ... for a long time a member of the same Mennonite "United Flemish and High-German" community [of which Jacob van Ruysdael was also a member]'. However, in a note, Leeftang says he bases this assertion on H. F. Wijnman's biography of van Ruysdael and his close relatives, *Het Leven der Ruysdaels*, a work in three parts that I refer to several times in this chapter. But, I can find no mention of such a statement in Wijnman's biography. Rather, what I do find is the proposition, mentioned in the note above, that Jacob's uncle, Salomon Jacobsz. van Ruysdael, belonged to this community. See: Leeftang, *op. cit.*, pp. 22, and 27, n. 15, and Wijnman, *op. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

⁴⁰ Dutch: *uit Doopsgezinden kring voortgesproten*. (My translation). See H. F. Wijnman, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

⁴¹ In his account of the Mennonite faith in the Netherlands between 1531 and 1675, S. Zijlstra notes four fundamental points of difference between Mennonism and Calvinism. These do not include creation and providence. (See: S. Zijlstra, *Om de ware gemeente en de oude gronden: Geschiedenis van de dopersen in de Nederlanden 1531-1675* (Hilversum: Uitgeverij Verloren, 2000), p. 226). Likewise, Timothy George notes that the Mennonites believed in the sovereignty of the Creator God over his creation, as did the Calvinists. (See: George, *op. cit.*, pp. 310-311).

⁴² Reindert Falkenburg, 'Landschapschilderkunst en doperse spiritualiteit in de zeventiende eeuw - een connectie?', in: *Doopsgezinde Bijdragen: nieuwe reeks* 16, 1990, pp. 129-54, at p. 153, and S. Zijlstra, *op. cit.*, pp. 485-7.

corresponding ideas held by Calvinists and so we would still expect a reading of his works consonant with the Reformed understanding of God's relationship to his creation. Indeed, if we look in detail at *Het Korenveld*, we shall see a painting that expresses ideas about God and the world similar to those found in Calvin's own writings, the creedal statements of the Dutch Reformed Church, and contemporary Calvinist literature such as meditations and poetry.

Het Korenveld - an analysis

One of the first things that strikes the viewer of this picture is its compositional unity.

Unity

Maarten de Klijn suggests that this, along with other features such as fidelity to nature and a coherent colour palette, can be found in many seventeenth-century Dutch landscape paintings and argues that it bespeaks a specifically Calvinist world view⁴³. He may be going too far here as he seems to exclude the possibility that other world views might also express themselves in this way. But, there is no doubt that the unity expressed in van Ruisdael's work and the manner in which he achieves it resonate with important themes in Calvinist thought.

In the first instance, it reminds us of the unity of God, a doctrine which Calvin himself asserts very strongly⁴⁴, and which also finds expression in the *Nederlandse*

⁴³ De Klijn, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁴⁴ *Institutes* I, xiii, 1 and 16.

Geloofsbelijdenis ('Dutch (Reformed Church) Confession of Faith')⁴⁵ and the Heidelberg Catechism⁴⁶. But, what is perhaps more interesting for us here is how van Ruisdael portrays this unity in *Het Korenveld*. First, he manages to fit all the elements of the picture into one overall design. It is likely that he does this by selecting the features that he wants to depict and arranging them so as to create the impression of order and balance⁴⁷. Several commentators have tried to associate the scene in *Het Korenveld* with a particular geographical location⁴⁸, but although van Ruisdael may have had a certain area in mind when he painted this work, it is more than likely that he used this merely as a starting point from which to construct a scene using motives from his sketchbook or memory. So, for example, he places the small figures at the bottom of the wheatfield to

⁴⁵ Article One of the Dutch confession of faith runs, '*The one God*. We all believe with our hearts and confess with our mouths that there is but *one* God, a completely unique and undivided being. He is eternal, unfathomable, invisible, immutable, unending, omnipotent, totally wise, righteous, good and a very abundant source of all goodness. Dutch: *De enige God. Wij geloven allen met het hart en belijden met de mond, dat er één God is, een geheel enig en éénvoudig wezen. Hij is eeuwig, niet te doorgronden, onzienlijk, onveranderlijk, oneindig, almachtig, volkomen wijs, rechtvaardig, goed en een zeer overvloedige bron van al het goede.* (My translation). See: Zwanepol, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

⁴⁶ In the Heidelberg Catechism, God's oneness seems to be treated more as a self-evident truth than as something that needs to be explicitly stated. However, it is asserted in question 25 of Sunday 8: Question 25, 'Since there is but *one* unique divine being, why do you then speak of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost?' Answer: Because God has revealed in his Word, that these three distinct persons are the one, true and eternal God'. Dutch: *Vraag 25, Wanneer er maar één enig goddelijk Wezen is, waarom spreekt gij dan van de Vader, de Zoon en de Heilige Geest? Antwoord: Omdat God zich in zijn Woord zo geopenbaard heeft, dat deze drie onderscheiden personen de enige, waarachtige en eeuwige God zijn.* (My translation). See: Zwanepol, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

⁴⁷ Compare Walford's description of the process of 'selective naturalness'. See n. 25 above.

⁴⁸ Gerson argues that *Het Korenveld* is based on a view at Naarden looking out on the *Zuiderzee* (*Ijsselmeer*). (See: H. Gerson, *op. cit.*, p. 21a). Jakob Rosenberg also argues that the painting depicts the coast of the *Zuiderzee*. (See: Jakob Rosenberg, *Jacob van Ruisdael* (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1928), p. 78). Fuchs is less specific, saying that the scene may be from the southern or eastern coast of the *Zuiderzee*, although it may equally be from elsewhere, such as the Veluwe and the Friesian South-west corner. (See Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 288). By contrast, Slive does not connect it with a clearly identifiable geographical location. (See: Slive (2001), *op. cit.*, p. 111).

balance the trees in the foreground in front of the top of the wheatfield.

Secondly, there is a sense in which van Ruisdael uses light as the unifying force in his compositions. He does this not so much by filling the canvas with light, but rather by using one light source, the sun, and depicting how it interacts with the different elements in the picture⁴⁹. In *Het Korenveld*, as in other works depicting wheatfields, such as *Grainfields Flanking a Road* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art)⁵⁰, van Ruisdael depicts an area devoid of cloud in the top left hand corner of the painting, through which the sun shines onto the elements in the canvas. But, van Ruisdael also depicts the light as it would reflect from one element to another, joining these elements together. As Denis Cosgrove writes, 'the light reflecting among the clouds and cast down in pools of glowing colour on the ground is what raises these pictures above pure topographical description'⁵¹. But in *Het Korenveld* it is the effect of the light on the wheatfield itself which above all demands our attention. Fuchs refers to its colour as *het stralende geel* ('the radiant yellow')⁵², whilst Slive refers to it as 'the golden grainfield, illuminated by a shaft of silvery light from the sea-reflecting sky...'⁵³. Gold is of course a colour that is traditionally associated with heaven in art⁵⁴, but as well as reminding the

⁴⁹ Denis Cosgrove writes that van Ruisdael and other Dutch landscape artists had a concern for light as the unifying element in their work. However, I am not sure that Cosgrove pays sufficient attention to the use of the absence of light in van Ruisdael's work, such as that which we find in the foreground of *Het Korenveld*. See: Cosgrove (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁵⁰ Slive (2001), *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁵¹ Cosgrove (1984), *op. cit.*, p. 153.

⁵² Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

⁵³ Slive (2001), *op. cit.*, p. 128.

⁵⁴ Fendrich, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

viewer of this, the light falling on the wheatfield also draws our attention to God's action in the world.

The wheatfield

First, this is an area which is not only well lit, but also well-cultivated. This stands in contrast to the darker area in the foreground which is overgrown and uncultivated. By his general providence⁵⁵, God acts to retain order in the face of the ever-present danger of the world falling into chaos. The opposition of the ordered mid-ground with the chaotic foreground reminds us of this⁵⁶. Perhaps we are also reminded of the order/chaos dichotomy by the calmness of the water in the background of the picture on the left. Certainly, John Calvin believed that because water is lighter than earth, if it were not for God's providential action, water would cover the surface of the world⁵⁷. I do not know whether van Ruisdael had this particular idea in mind, but I wonder whether the presence of the water here reminds us that for the Dutch, there was, and still is, a constant struggle to prevent the sea from flooding their land.

There is a sense in which this view of providence is concerned with God's work of restraining the negative or chaotic forces active in the world. It also seems that according to the ideas that informed general providence, God kept order in the world through a series of immutable laws⁵⁸. This though brought with it the danger that it might limit

⁵⁵ *Institutes* I, xvi, 4.

⁵⁶ David Brown notes a similar pattern of divine order triumphing over chaos in van Ruisdael's *View of Egmond aan Zee (1648)*. See: Brown (2004), *op. cit.*, pp. 406-7.

⁵⁷ Schreiner, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-26.

⁵⁸ Deason, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-7.

God's freedom to act according to his own will⁵⁹. So, in order to affirm God's freedom, Calvin made a distinction between this type of providence and special providence, which seems to me to bespeak a more positive view of God's interaction with the world.

As well as allowing Calvin to affirm God's absolute freedom, special providence also allows him to argue that God cares for all his creation at the smallest level of detail. In a passage where he seems to contrast general with special providence, he writes,

But faith ought...to conclude [that God] not only... drives the celestial frame as well as its several parts by a universal motion, but also...sustains, nourishes, and cares for, everything he has made, even to the least sparrow [cf. Matt. 10:29]⁶⁰.

This passage from Matthew seems to be a popular one for describing God's special providence. It is referred to again by the Dutch Reformed preacher Philip van Lansberghe in a sermon in 1645 on question 26 of the Heidelberg Catechism which also discusses special providence. He says,

For all that has been created by God the Father has also been continually sustained by him...for Christ says, 'are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of these shall fall to the ground without your Father [knowing it]. And also all the hairs on your head are counted'⁶¹.

⁵⁹ Compare Garrett Green's assertion that Calvin's primary concern with the use of images in late medieval piety was that it could limit God's freedom. Green, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁶⁰ *Institutes* I, xvi, 1.

⁶¹ Philip van Lansberghe, *Catechismus, ofte Onderwijsinghe inde christelijcke religie, dewelcke soo inde Nederlandsche als Paltzsche Kercken ghepredickt ende geleert wort: in LII predication seer grondich*

Special providence is also treated in questions 27 and 28 of the Heidelberg Catechism⁶² and in Article 13 of the Dutch Confession of Faith. Here, it is written,

God's providence. *We believe, that this good God, after he had created all things, did not leave them to their own devices or abandon them to chance or to fate, but so governs and rules them according to his holy will, that in this world nothing happens without his decree*⁶³.

In van Ruisdael's *Het Korenveld*, we also see an expression of God's special providence. God sustains his people by providing them with the wheat from the wheatfield with which they can make bread. I also wonder whether the wheatfield is an allusion to Christ as the bread of life and as such speaks of spiritual as well as material sustenance⁶⁴. To my mind, van Ruisdael also alludes to special providence formally by depicting each individual stalk in certain parts of the wheatfield.

As well as reminding us that God provides for us, *Het Korenveld* also alludes to the fact

uytgeleydt ende verklaert, door Philippum Lansbergium, ... ende uyt de Latijnsche in onse Nederlandtsche tale ghetrouwelijck overgheset door Johannem Gys... t'Amstelredam, by Hendrick Laurensz. ..., 1645, fol. 63. Dutch: *Dat alles wat van Godt den Vader geschapen is ooc van hem geduyrichinc onderhouden... Want Aldus spreekt Christus Worden niet twee muschkens om eē pennicxken verkocht? Ende niet een van desen en sal op de aerde vallen sonder uwen Vader. Ende oock uwe hayren des hoofts syn alle ghetelt.* (All quotations from this work are my translation).

⁶² Zwanepol, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁶³ Dutch: *Gods voorzienigheid. Wij geloven, dat deze goede God, nadat Hij alle dingen geschapen had, ze niet aan zichzelf heeft overgelaten of aan het toeval of het lot heeft prijsgegeven, maar ze overeenkomstig zijn heilige wil zo bestuurt en regeert, dat in deze wereld niets gebeurt zonder zijn besluit.* (My translation). See: Zwanepol, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

⁶⁴ It may also be that the wheatfield is a sign that the United Provinces are God's Promised Land. With particular reference to Deuteronomy 8: 7-8, the seventeenth-century Dutch Mennonite preacher Jan van Westerhoven suggests this and with reference to the same passage in Deuteronomy goes on to say that there will be no shortage of bread in the Promised Land as a result of the abundance of wheat. See: Jan van Westerhoven, *Den Schepper Verheerlijkt in de schepselen...*, *op. cit.*, p. 368.

that he does this not as a result of any actions on our part, but rather as a sign of his grace. Half of the wheatfield has been harvested, however we do not see anyone at work in the field. We might expect the three figures at the bottom of the wheatfield to be doing this work, but they are not⁶⁵. Further, we see no wheatsheaves in the field, which would be another sign that work is being or has recently been carried out on the field. One way of reading this is to consider that we do not need to work in order to earn either God's favour or salvation. Both are freely given. However, we should always remember that such a reading is provisional and that although it may be reasonable for one painting, it will not necessarily be so for other works by the same artist. For example, if one looks at other paintings depicting wheatfields by van Ruisdael, one sees people at work busily gathering the wheat⁶⁶, and indeed many of these other paintings include a number of wheatsheaves⁶⁷. In this respect at least, these works seem to have more in common with paintings by the Catholic artist, Peter Paul Rubens (1577-1640), than with van Ruisdael's *Het Korenveld*. If one looks at Rubens' *The Rainbow Landscape* (1636/7) (London: The Wallace Collection) (plate 15)⁶⁸, one sees a dynamic scene of herders, women carrying jugs and workers piling hay onto haystacks. As the title suggests, the whole scene is bordered by a bright rainbow which bespeaks God's presence as he watches his people

⁶⁵ It is an open question as to whether these figures are workers who are resting, or merely people who happen to be at the foot of the wheatfield. Karsten Müller says that they are workers (Müller, *op. cit.*, p. 129), whilst E. John Walford suggests that figures such as these help us to contemplate the scene as they 'induce us into a vicarious experience of the landscape' (Walford, *op. cit.*, p. 49). Others such as Seymour Slive do not pass judgment on what the figures represent (Slive (2001), *op. cit.*, p. 128).

⁶⁶ Slive (2001), *op. cit.*, p. 116 (plate 88) and p. 123 (plate 98).

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 119-123.

⁶⁸ *Wallace Collection: Forty Paintings* (London: The Trustees of the Wallace Collection, 1977), plate 23.

working with him to care for the world and for themselves. There is perhaps a sense here in which man is still considered a secondary cause and that he needs to actively co-operate with God in the government of the world⁶⁹. One can see this again in a later work by another Catholic artist, John Rogers Herbert (1810-1890), *Laborare est Orare* (1862) (Tate Galleries), in which a group of Cistercian monks are seen collecting wheat into sheaves under a clear blue sky⁷⁰.

Perhaps the various treatments of this theme by van Ruisdael reflect the uncertainty in the seventeenth-century mind on the question of secondary causes. Some commentators, though, would have us exclude any consideration of God in van Ruisdael's work at all, arguing that *Het Korenveld* and similar works speak primarily of the increased prosperity of the newly independent United Provinces in the mid-1600s. They may well be right that van Ruisdael wanted to reflect this new found wealth in his work, but I do not believe that he saw this merely as the product of man's own endeavours, but recognized that it was the result of God's providential care for his people. The fact that viewers of his landscapes may have read his work in this way is reflected in a poem by the Amsterdam poet Reyer Anslo in about 1656. He says that painting, 'sharpens us with useful lessons through the eye, and, taking its lead from Nature, God's daughter, rich in meaning, it creates with paint on canvases and panels that which is visible, with which the spirit wants to engage'⁷¹.

⁶⁹ See pp. 228-9 above.

⁷⁰ David Dimbleby et al., *A Picture of Britain* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), p. 142.

⁷¹ Dutch: ...het scherpt door 't oog ons nutte lessen in, / En volgt Natuur, Godts dochter, ryk van zin, / En schept met verf op doeken op paneelen / Wat zichtbaar is, waar op de geest wil spelen. See: R. Anslo, Joan de Haes (ed.), *Poësy* (Rotterdam, 1713), p. 159. (My translation).

In this regard, I suggest that just as the wheatfield in van Ruisdael's *Het Korenveld* leads us to reflect on God's action in the world, so too does the sky above it⁷².

The Sky and the Clouds in *Het Korenveld*

Of course, in Christianity, the sky has always been associated with heaven and with God, and the Reformed tradition is no exception here. With reference to the author of Psalm 104, Calvin writes in *Institutes*,

*Likewise, the same prophet skilfully compares the heavens, as they are stretched out, to his royal tent and says that he has laid the beams of his chambers on the waters, has made the clouds his chariot, rides on the wings of the wind, and that the winds and lightning bolts are his swift messengers...And since the glory of his power and wisdom shine more brightly above, heaven is often called his palace*⁷³.

In van Ruisdael's own lifetime, the Dutch Calvinist preacher Ulphardus Ekelman produced a book entitled *Lessen uit het Boek der Nature en Ervarenheit...* ('Lessons from the book of nature and experience'), which consisted of one hundred meditations on natural features and man-made objects, such as windmills, that one might see in the countryside. It was based on the idea of nature as the second book of God's revelation and amongst the

⁷² E. John Walford goes as far to suggest that landscapes such as those of van Ruisdael, built up from a range of motives according to the process that he calls 'selective naturalness', would inevitably arouse the mind of the viewer to a state of contemplation, which would eventually lead him or her to think of God. See: Walford, *op. cit.*, pp. 20 and 28.

⁷³ *Institutes* I, v, i. Latin: *ididem etiam scite idem propheta coelos ut expansi sunt regio illius tentorio comparat, coenacula dicit contagnasse in aquis, nubes eius esse vehicula, equitare super alas ventorum, ventos et fulgetra celeres esse eius nuntios. Et quoniam plenius sursum refulget potentiae eius et sapientiae gloria, passim vocatur coelum eius palatium.* See: CR XXX, CO II, pp. 41-2.

meditations on natural features was one on the rising of the sun, another on beholding a bright day after a long thunderstorm, and another on beholding the sky. In this last, he writes,

*Where else can I look but to follow the upright figure of my body and look upwards; and what else can I see when I thus look into the air above than the heavens? Where was there ever such a worthy object before the eyes of so a noble creature as man; where was such a wonderful testimony to the power of such a craftsman as God?...No view can build up our innate sense of a divine being as well as the view of these beautiful heavens*⁷⁴.

A common feature of the skies that van Ruisdael depicts is that they are often filled with clouds, and like the sky, these too have a long history of association with the divine in Christianity⁷⁵. We have already noted that Calvin says that the Psalmist writes that God has made the clouds his chariot⁷⁶, and a little after van Ruisdael's death, this trope was picked up by the Mennonite preacher, Jan van Westerhoven, in his work of praise to the Creator, *Den Schepper Verheerlijckt in de schepselen* ('The Creator glorified in [his]

⁷⁴ Dutch: *Waar heen kan ik anders sien als ik de opgerichte gesteltenis mijns lichaams volge als om hoge; en wat kan ik anders sien wanneer ik dus in de ruime lucht om hooge sie als den Hemel? Waar was ook oyt sulk een waerdigh voorwerpsel voor de ogen van soo 'n edel schepsel als de mensch; waar sulk' een heerlijk proefstuck van de macht eens sulker werkmeesters als Godt?...Geen gesicht nochtans 't welck die aangeborene indruk onser natuere van een Godtlik wesen soo kan opkruwen als het gezicht van desen schonen Hemel.* See: Ulphardus Ekelman, *Lessen uit het Boek der Nature en Ervarenheit, Waargenomen in Bedenkingen op Daaghliks voorgevallene gelegentheden, door Ulphardus Ekelman Predikant in Bellingwolde t'Amsterdam. By Jacob Benjaminsz. Boekverkooper in de Warmoes-straet in de Drukkerij (Groningen, April 8, 1661)*, pp. 7-8. (All quotations from this work are my translation).

⁷⁵ For a good summary of this association, including its representation in art, see: John Gage, 'Clouds over Europe' in: Edward Morris (ed.), *Constable's Clouds: Paintings and Clouds Studies by John Constable* (Edinburgh: National Galleries of Scotland, 2000), pp. 125-134, at p. 126.

⁷⁶ *Institutes* I, v, i.

creatures')⁷⁷. Again, the Calvinist preacher Ulphardus Ekelman devotes one of his meditations to the contemplation of a very dark cloud. He writes,

*It is [God's] way that he first warns us with a dark cloud when there is a storm of his punishment at hand. He raises the axe first before he joins battle with it; he raises a battlecry; he lets notice be given of the war before he comes onto the field with his hosts*⁷⁸.

The reader is left in no doubt that Ekelman wants them to see clouds as divine portents: God is giving his people a warning and if they do not heed this warning, he will punish them. But, it is interesting to note that during the seventeenth century, there was much debate as to whether natural phenomena such as clouds, or comets, should continue to be considered as portents as they had been for a long time before.

Discussion took place both inside and outside Reformed circles. One figure who argued that natural phenomena should merely be considered as just that, natural phenomena, was the French-born Catholic philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650). He lived in Leiden between 1629 and 1649 and it is clear that his views on this matter influenced many people, particularly in the United Provinces. These included Joannes Georgius Graevius (1632-1703), a professor at the University of Utrecht, who, on the occasion of a comet in 1665, gave a public lecture, in which he defended Descartes' point of view that the comet

⁷⁷ Jan van Westerhoven, *op. cit.*, p. 128. This book was published in 1685. Van Ruisdael died in 1682.

⁷⁸ Dutch: *Dit is zijn maniere dat hy ons eerst door duistere wolken waarschouwt als er een onweder van zijn straffe voor handen is. Hy heft de bijle eerst op eer hy de slaghe daar mede volbrengt; hy verwerkt een wapenkreet; hy laat den oorloogh door sijne Heraulten aanseggen eer hy met zijn heyrsharen te velt komt.* Ekelman, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

should be seen merely as a natural phenomenon. This was in direct contradiction to the views of another professor at the University of Utrecht, the eminent Reformed theologian Gisbertus Voetius (1589-1676)⁷⁹. Voetius argued strongly that such phenomena should be seen as divine portents. But the views of Voetius, and it seems those of Ekelman, were not held by all in the Reformed Church. Theo van Deursen tells us that there were those in the Church who were opposed to the idea that the motion of the stars announced impending disasters. For them, he tells us, this would amount to fortune-telling⁸⁰. And it is with these opponents of Voetius and others, including Ekelman, that I want to stay for a while, because I wonder whether they offer us a way forward in how we view not only natural phenomena, but also works of visual art. For not only did they challenge the belief of Voetius and others that natural phenomena should be seen as portents, but they also refused to subscribe to the view associated with Descartes, and subsequently adopted by modern science, that natural phenomena are simply objects that act in a manner determined by the laws of nature⁸¹. What they argued, instead, was that natural phenomena such as stars show us how God *could* act, but not how he inevitably will act⁸². This position is non-deterministic and it differs from both the view associated with

⁷⁹ Vermij, *op. cit.*, p. 338.

⁸⁰ A. T. van Deursen, Maarten Ultee (trans.), *Plain Lives in a Golden Age: popular culture, religion and society in seventeenth-century Holland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 254. Van Deursen seems to suggest that the Reformed Church as a whole was opposed to reading natural phenomena as portents. However, as I have noted above, there were clearly some in the Reformed Church such as Voetius and Ekelman who continued to see them as portents.

⁸¹ Some may argue that with the advent of quantum physics, it is no longer appropriate to consider nature as deterministic. However, we are not dealing with quantum phenomena here, but rather those phenomena which may still be accounted for by the Newtonian laws of physics.

⁸² van Deursen, *op. cit.*, p. 254.

Descartes and that by which natural phenomena are seen as portents in that these are deterministic and may be seen to limit God's freedom. But, it is with the latter view that I wish to deal in particular here as I suggest that it was informed by the very same understanding of how God interacts with the created order that informed the view of many in the Middle Ages towards religious images. And, what is particularly interesting is that just as the idea of seeing natural phenomena as portents limited God's freedom, so for many including John Calvin and other Reformers, the manner in which religious images were used by some in churches in the late medieval period likewise placed a limit on God's freedom⁸³.

The understanding that informed both these views was that God as primary cause acted in the world through secondary causes such as natural phenomena, people and also images⁸⁴. And just as this led people to believe that God acted through natural phenomena in pre-determined ways, so I suggest it led them to believe that he would act through religious images in similarly pre-determined ways. This of course would amount to putting a limit on God's freedom. But, as I mention above, in Reformed thought there has now been a move away from seeing God's interaction with the world in terms of a primary cause and secondary causes. However, whereas this has been reflected in a revised understanding of natural phenomena as indicators of how God might act in the world rather than as portents, it has not been reflected in a new understanding of works of visual art. I suggest

⁸³ Green, *op. cit.*, p. 96.

⁸⁴ McGrath, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

that we should correct his anomaly, and see works of art less as objects through which God acts in the world and more as systems of signs that point to how he might act, or even remind of his action in the world. If we view works of visual art in this way, then, I suggest, they are more likely to be accepted in churches in the Reformed tradition than has hitherto been the case.

This discussion arose from our consideration of the clouds in van Ruisdael's *Het Korenveld*. Let us now return to these and ask ourselves how those who saw this painting in the seventeenth century would have understood them. Perhaps, some might still have seen them as portents, particularly the large dark cloud in the centre of the picture that is almost anthropomorphic, whilst others may have seen them as mere natural phenomena, subject to never-changing laws of nature. But there may have been yet others who saw them as reminders of God's activity in the world, which is how I propose that we should view them to-day. But however these clouds may have been understood, there is no doubt that one feature that all could agree on is that they are an example of how van Ruisdael's works display a great variety of cloud formations.

For some, variety in a cloudscape was a reflection of God's activity in the world⁸⁵, but I suggest that above all this variety allowed van Ruisdael to express his response to nature

⁸⁵ For example in his guide to painting, the *Illuminierbuch*, Valentin Boltz von Rufach notes that the mixture of clouds is taught by the heavens themselves and that artists should follow the Creator of the heavens in depicting clouds in all their shades of colour. Although this book was published in Basel in 1549, Ank C. Esmeijer notes that it had a great influence on art theory books produced in Netherlands in the seventeenth century. See: Ank C. Esmeijer, 'Cloudscapes in theory and practice' in: *Simiolus* 9:1, 1977, pp. 123-48, at pp. 126 ff. Huigen Leeftang also notes that for the Mennonite preacher, Jan van Westerhoven, cloudscapes were the most beautiful part of creation because of their continual variation. See: Leeftang, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

most vividly. He does this by engaging both his emotions, and here we are reminded of John Constable's famous remark in a letter to Archdeacon John Fisher, where he described the sky as the chief 'organ of sentiment'⁸⁶, and his imagination. By this I do not mean that van Ruisdael created pictures of fantasy with no basis in reality, but rather that he used his imagination to assemble a possible arrangement of clouds though not necessarily one that he had actually observed in nature⁸⁷. Indeed, it seems that the realism with which van Ruisdael depicts his clouds has been praised by modern meteorologists⁸⁸. This attention to detail which allows us to determine what type of clouds are being depicted is in stark contrast to the generalized staffage that populates this and other works by van Ruisdael. I wonder here whether we find an expression of the tensions between generalization or idealism and realism which are so much a feature of visual art theory in the seventeenth century⁸⁹. Later in his career, van Ruisdael increasingly moved his tree motives into the mid- or back-ground and they thus became more generalized⁹⁰. However, here in *Het Korenveld*, as in other earlier works, he treats his tree motives,

⁸⁶ Gage, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁸⁷ Hans-Joachim Raupp argues that Dutch landscape artists of the seventeenth century in general painted 'possible', but not actual, scenes from nature. Likewise, Boudewijn Bakker argues that landscapes were not just a reflection of reality, but were built up by the artist in the studio using selected motives, and, with particular reference to van Ruisdael's work, Gerson argues that his works are not what he calls 'landscapes of fact'. See: Hans-Joachim Raupp, 'Zur Bedeutung von Thema und Symbol für die holländische Landschaftsmalerei des 17. Jahrhunderts', in: *Jahrbuch der Staatlichen Kunstsammlungen in Baden-Württemberg* 17, 1980, pp. 85-110, at p. 85, Boudewijn Bakker, *Landschap en wereldbeeld van Van Eyck tot Rembrandt* (Academisch Proefschrift, 2003), p. 196, and Gerson, *op. cit.*, p. 21a.

⁸⁸ Gage, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

⁸⁹ James S. Ackerman, 'Science and Visual Art', in: Hedley Howell Rhys (ed.), *Seventeenth Century Science and the Arts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961), pp. 82 ff. I also wonder to what extent van Ruisdael's realistic depiction of clouds, and of trees, is a reflection of the idea which had much currency at this time that it was in the particular that the general could be found. See: Ackerman, p. 66.

⁹⁰ Ashton et al. *op. cit.*, p. 23.

particularly the *boomgroep* ('group of trees') at the front to the right of the picture with a remarkable degree of realism. And it is to this motive that we now turn for the final part of this chapter.

The Trees in *Het Korenveld*

The realism that we see in van Ruisdael's trees parallels the growing interest in the observation of the natural world that began in the previous century with the new empiricism of Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and led to the study of the microscopic world by van Leeuwenhoek and Robert Hooke (1635-1703) in van Ruisdael's own time⁹¹. Maarten de Klijn ascribes this increased interest in the natural world, in particular its affirmation of the distinctiveness of individual objects, to a Reformed world view⁹², but although this interest in the particular does reflect well the Reformed doctrine of special providence, this is somewhat of an overstatement. For we should remember that the Catholic, René Descartes, was famous for dissecting animals to see how they functioned⁹³, and at the other end of the scale, the Catholic Galileo Galilei advanced our understanding of the cosmos through his observation of the sky⁹⁴. What is more certain, though, is that

⁹¹ Maarten de Klijn seems to suggest that the increased realism in landscape painting was a direct consequence of the increased interest in the natural world. See: de Klijn, *op. cit.*, pp. 18 ff. James Ackerman rejects this idea and argues rather that a tendency towards idealism in art in the seventeenth century led to idealism in science, such as the fact that despite accurate astronomical observations, Galileo Galilei believed that the orbits of the planets must be necessarily circular as opposed to elliptical. See: Ackerman, *op. cit.*. Whilst this argument clearly has some merit, I agree with de Klijn that the close observation of nature that we see in Dutch landscape art, and in particular in the clouds and trees of van Ruisdael, must to some extent be a reflection of man's increased interest in his environment.

⁹² de Klijn, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁹³ Gary Hatfield, 'Descartes' physiology and its relation to his psychology', in: John Cottingham (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes* (Cambridge: CUP, 1992), pp. 335-370, at p. 340.

⁹⁴ See p. 227 above.

the realism in the work of Jacob van Ruisdael and other Dutch landscape artists such as Cornelis Hendricksz. Vroom (1591-1661) and Esaias van de Velde (1587-1630)⁹⁵ represents the culmination of the change that I described in Chapter One from treating landscape merely as a backdrop to historical subjects in a mannerist style to making it a subject in its own right depicted in a naturalistic manner⁹⁶. This development may also reflect the idea of creation as the second book of God's revelation, as postulated within the Reformed tradition. The idea that the world could tell us something of God was current in the Middle Ages, but whereas then the world was often seen as a reflection, albeit a somewhat imperfect one, of heaven, in the Reformed understanding of creation, it was affirmed in its own right as a place which bespoke the beauty and glory of God. Calvin himself clearly saw the world in this way and this understanding of the world is also reflected in the creedal statements of the Dutch Reformed Church and poetry written by seventeenth-century Dutch Calvinists.

Calvin wrote 'a passage of lyrical delight in the manifestation of God in creation' in his Preface to the New Testament, written in 1534 and published in Olivétan's French Bible in June, 1535⁹⁷. He also describes how the glory of God is manifest in the world in *Institutes*

⁹⁵ Keyes et al. *op. cit.*, pp. 252-5. Both of these artists spent much of their artistic careers in Haarlem, which was also home to Jacob van Ruisdael during his formative years. Several commentators note the importance of this town in the rise of realistic landscape painting, and one, Åke Bengtsson, suggests possible reasons for this. See: Walford, *op. cit.*, p. 5, Reindert Falkenburg, 'Calvinism and the Emergence of Dutch Seventeenth-Century Landscape Art - A Critical Evaluation' in: P. Corby Finney (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 343-368, at pp. 343-4, and Åke Bengtsson, *Studies on the rise of realistic landscape painting in Holland 1610-1625, (Figura III)* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1952), pp. 23-66.

⁹⁶ For an excellent description of this process, see: P. Huvenne et al. (eds.), *op. cit.*.

⁹⁷ *Institutes* I, v, i, n. 4. See also Schreiner, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

I, v. The idea that the world is a book in which we can see God's glory is made explicit in Article Two of the Confession of Faith of the Dutch Reformed Church. This runs,

*How we know God: We know Him by two means. Firstly, through the creation, preservation, and government of the whole world. For this is before our eyes as a most elegant book, in which all creatures, big and small, are the letters, that give us to behold what cannot be seen of God, that is his eternal power and divinity, just as the apostle Paul says in Romans 1: 20...Secondly he makes himself more clearly and completely known to us through his holy and divine Word...*⁹⁸

This idea also underpins the meditations on nature by the Reformed preacher Ulphardus Ekelman, a fact most succinctly evidenced by the title of his work, *Lessen uit het Boek der Nature en Ervarenheit*, which as I mention above translates as 'Lessons from the book of nature and experience'⁹⁹. We also find it stated explicitly in a poem by the Calvinist poet and statesman Constantijn Huygens, *Hofwyck*. Here, he writes,

The book of everything / Of everything that [God] once captured in that great ball / the wonderful book of his six days of work. / We have miracles to tell

⁹⁸ Dutch: *Hoe wij God kennen: Wij kennen Hem door twee middelen. Ten eerste door de schepping, onderhouding en regering van de hele wereld. Want deze is voor onze ogen als een prachtig boek, waarin alle schepselen, groot en klein, de letters zijn, die ons te aanschouwen geven wat van God niet gezien kan worden, namelijk zijn eeuwige kracht en goddelijkheid, zoals de apostel Paulus zegt in Romeinen 1: 20...Ten tweede maakt Hij zichzelf nog duidelijker en volkomener aan ons bekend door zijn heilig en goddelijk Woord...* See: Zwanepol, *op. cit.*, p. 168. (My translation and use of standard font).

⁹⁹ See pp. 243-4 above, and n. 74 for full bibliographic details.

*from this book*¹⁰⁰.

Such a positive estimation of nature might lead us to expect that Calvinist activity in the world would only be of benefit to it. But, I wonder if we see this in practice. For there is a sense in which some Calvinists, rather than leaving God's creation alone, set about exploiting it and using it for their own ends. We see this well in a painting which depicts whale hunting on the shores of Spitsbergen¹⁰¹. Not only does this recall the expansive nature of colonization by the United Provinces in the seventeenth century, but it also reminds us that this involved using the wealth of God's creation for its own economic ends. The Dutch, though, may have felt that it was acceptable to carry out such activity. To support this view, they might have argued that by delivering them from the yoke of Spanish rule, God had shown them that they were now his chosen people¹⁰². This would have meant that, as they saw it, it was their duty to govern not only their own land, but also those further afield on God's behalf. Indeed, they may have seen themselves as God's stewards in his creation¹⁰³, but there is clearly a fine dividing line between managing the land on God's behalf and using it for one's own economic benefit.

¹⁰⁰ Dutch: *het Boek van alle ding, / Van alles dat Hij eens in 't groote Rond beving / Het wonderlicke Boeck van sijn' sess wercke-dagen. / Wij weten wonderen uijt dit Boeck te vertellen*. See: Constantijn Huygens, *Hofwyck*, F. L. Zwaan (ed.) (Jerusalem: Chev, 1977), p. 63, ll. 1599-1601. (My translation). Consider also a poem by the Calvinist poet Jacob Cats, in which he wrote about how contemplating nature led him to think of its creator. Here, we find the lines, 'let people say what they want, you can learn from trees / You can, wherever plants grow, honour the great Creator. / Wherever the eye turns, there you see ... things which cause you / to glorify his name and sing his praise'. See Fuchs, *op. cit.*, p. 291. (My translation).

¹⁰¹ Haley, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

¹⁰² See Chapter Five, where I discuss this belief in relation to the decoration in the *Jeruzalemkerk*, Amsterdam.

¹⁰³ Compare Genesis 1: 26.

There is also a sense in which for Calvinism human sin, particularly that which led to the Fall, had a deleterious effect on God's creation¹⁰⁴. Not only did the Fall diminish our ability to see the beauty of God in creation, but it also unleashed the forces of chaos, against which God is engaged in restoring order. We see this chaos well in the uncultivated, overgrown area at the front of van Ruisdael's *Het Korenveld*¹⁰⁵. We may also see it in the brownness of the leaves on the tree on the left of the *boomgroep* at the front of the picture, although this may merely reflect the fact that it is harvest time and autumn is approaching¹⁰⁶. But, perhaps we see it more clearly in the bare tree trunk that rises up from the *boomgroep* in the centre of the mid-ground of the painting.

To my mind, this tree trunk speaks to us in the same way that the trees in another poem by Constantijn Huygens *Boom* ('Tree') spoke to him. He writes,

The trees that I see,

Rising from the earth to the heaven with outstretched arms,

Are like the godless in distress, who rail against the sky,

*But to whom they know not*¹⁰⁷.

¹⁰⁴ Schreiner, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

¹⁰⁵ David Brown makes a similar connection between an overgrown area and sin in another of van Ruisdael's paintings, *View of Egmond aan Zee (1648)*. See: Brown (2004), *op. cit.*, pp. 406-7.

¹⁰⁶ Admittedly, my knowledge of trees is insufficient to determine what sort of tree this is. This *boomgroep* may well be an example of van Ruisdael's fondness for pairing oak and beech together of which Peter Ashton et al. speak. Further research would need to be carried out on this. See: Ashton et al., *op. cit.*, p. 12.

¹⁰⁷ Dutch: *De Boomen die ick sie / Van d'aerd ten hemel gaen niet uytgestreckten armen, / Zyn als de Goddeloos' in nood, die opwaert karmen, / En weten niet tot Wie.* See: *De gedichten van Constantijn Huygens, naar zijn Handschrift Uitgegeven, door Dr. J. A. Worp, Vijfde Deel 1652-1656* (Groningen: J. B. Wolters, 1895), p. 302. Note, I have not been able to locate the word 'karmen' in modern or Middle Dutch dictionaries. I translate the word as 'rail', based on a translation by David Cram at the web-page

Conclusion

As the reader will note, Huygens is commenting that there were those in society who were turning away from God. They were unhappy with their condition, but now did not know to whom they could vent their anger. Some of those who turned away from God did so because their faith was being radically challenged by new ways of seeing, which contradicted the understanding of the world that the established Church had long held. In Jacob van Ruisdael's *Het Korenveld*, we see the artist engaging with nature in a manner which allows us to explore these new ways of seeing. However, I suggest that rather than leading us away from God, van Ruisdael offers us a way of deepening our understanding of creation and of its creator. He shows us a world which experiences both the joy of knowing that God cares for everything in his creation, but also one which experiences the painful effects of human sin¹⁰⁸. Although this may not be how we would like to see the world, it is a view consonant with the Reformed understanding of the natural world and God's interaction with it. For this reason, I argue that the work of Jacob van Ruisdael and other similar paintings should be allowed to hang in churches informed by the Reformed tradition.

<http://www.brindin.com/pohuyboo.html>. Otherwise, this is my translation.

¹⁰⁸ Compare Seerveld (1995), *op. cit.*, pp. 60-62.

Conclusion

So, we come to the end of our journey. What I have attempted to do in the preceding pages is to re-conceive the relationship between Calvin, the Reformed tradition and visual art, and base it not so much on what he said specifically about visual art, but more on the fundamental principles underlying his theology.

We began by looking in detail at what Calvin wrote on religious images, and works of visual art in general, and found that his major concern lay with representations of God, and the transferring of the honour due to God to these or any other works of visual art.

We then went on to consider whether other aspects of his thought, in particular his epistemology, eschatology, understanding of music and ontology of church, allow us to argue for a more positive attitude towards visual art than would the consideration of what he wrote about visual art alone. In the process, we also opened up a discussion on the attitude towards the arts in the Reformed tradition, and found that this has gradually become more positive over time. In the first instance, this change was most noticeable in the form and content of the music used in Reformed worship, where the introduction of organ accompaniment and the move away from purely using metrical psalmody were marked changes from the parameters for music that Calvin himself established.

Through the centuries, though, this increased acceptance of the arts within Reformed churches has broadened to include the visual arts. This is reflected in both the architecture of these churches and in the decoration of important features such as pulpits, organs and stained-glass windows. Indeed, what we find in Reformed churches today is not only the decoration of these features, but also the occasional painting, and as we learnt in Chapter Five, this is so even in churches which are amongst the most conservative in the Reformed

tradition.

What I want to leave the reader with is a sense in which these developments should be encouraged, and I suggest that what they will have seen is that, far from being at variance with Calvin's theology, they are in fact consistent with many aspects of it, including those mentioned above. This may help us to believe that the increased presence of the visual arts in churches in the Reformed tradition is not a move away from the central tenets of this movement, but rather a trend that is consonant with the deeper rationale underpinning its theology, particularly as the allusiveness of this art allows us to depict divine action in the world, without compromising the radical otherness and glory of God.

However, I recognize that I have only taken this project a certain distance. I have limited myself primarily to looking at two types of visual artwork, history and landscape paintings. I was able to do this, in part, as I argued that these may be seen as sets of symbols which allude to the first and second books of God's revelation. It would be a valuable exercise in the future to reflect on whether other types of visual art, such as abstract art and sculpture, may also be used within Reformed churches. I also limited the attention I gave to more practical considerations such as how these works of art may be used in the life of a church. In Chapter Three, I considered the communal aspects of making and reflecting on art and throughout this study have suggested that works of art need not be placed in the central worship areas of churches, but, rather, in other parts of these buildings such as side-chapels, entrance halls or vestries. However, I have left unanswered questions of how works of art may be used in activities such as sermons¹ and times of prayer and have

¹ David Schuringa considers this question in: *Hearing the Word in a Visual Age*, *op. cit.*.

not undertaken the task of asking people in these churches to reflect on what works of art may mean for them and how it might enrich their spiritual life. This would be a useful task and would provide a valuable complement to the more theoretical ideas discussed in this work. But, such a task, as with much else, lies in the future.

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Plate 1



Plate 2



Plate 3



Plate 4

Psaume 118: «Rendez a Dieu louange & gloire»

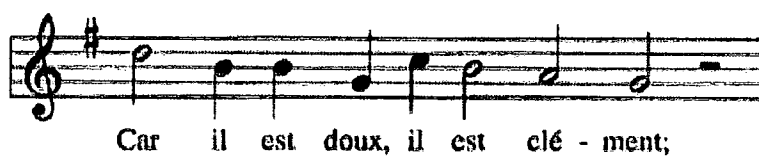
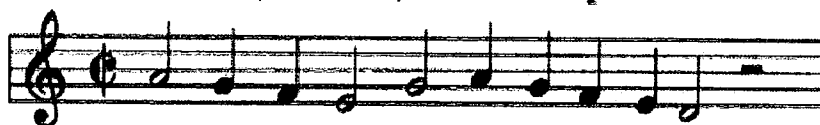


Plate 5

Psaume 50: «Le Dieu, le Fort, l'Eternel parlera»



Le Tout-Puis-sant, le Dieu fort par-le-ra



Et haut et clair, sa voix con-vo-que-ra



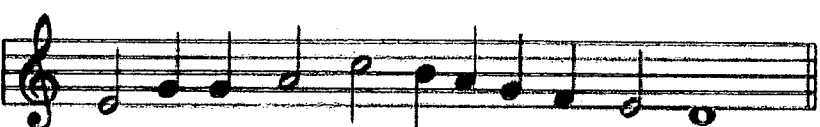
Tou-te la terre, O-rient et Oc-ci-dent.



De-puis Si-on, Dieu clair et é-vi-dent,



Ra-yon-ne-ra de lu-mière si bel-le.



No-tre Dieu vient; dé-jà il vous ap-pel-le.

Plate 6



Plate 7

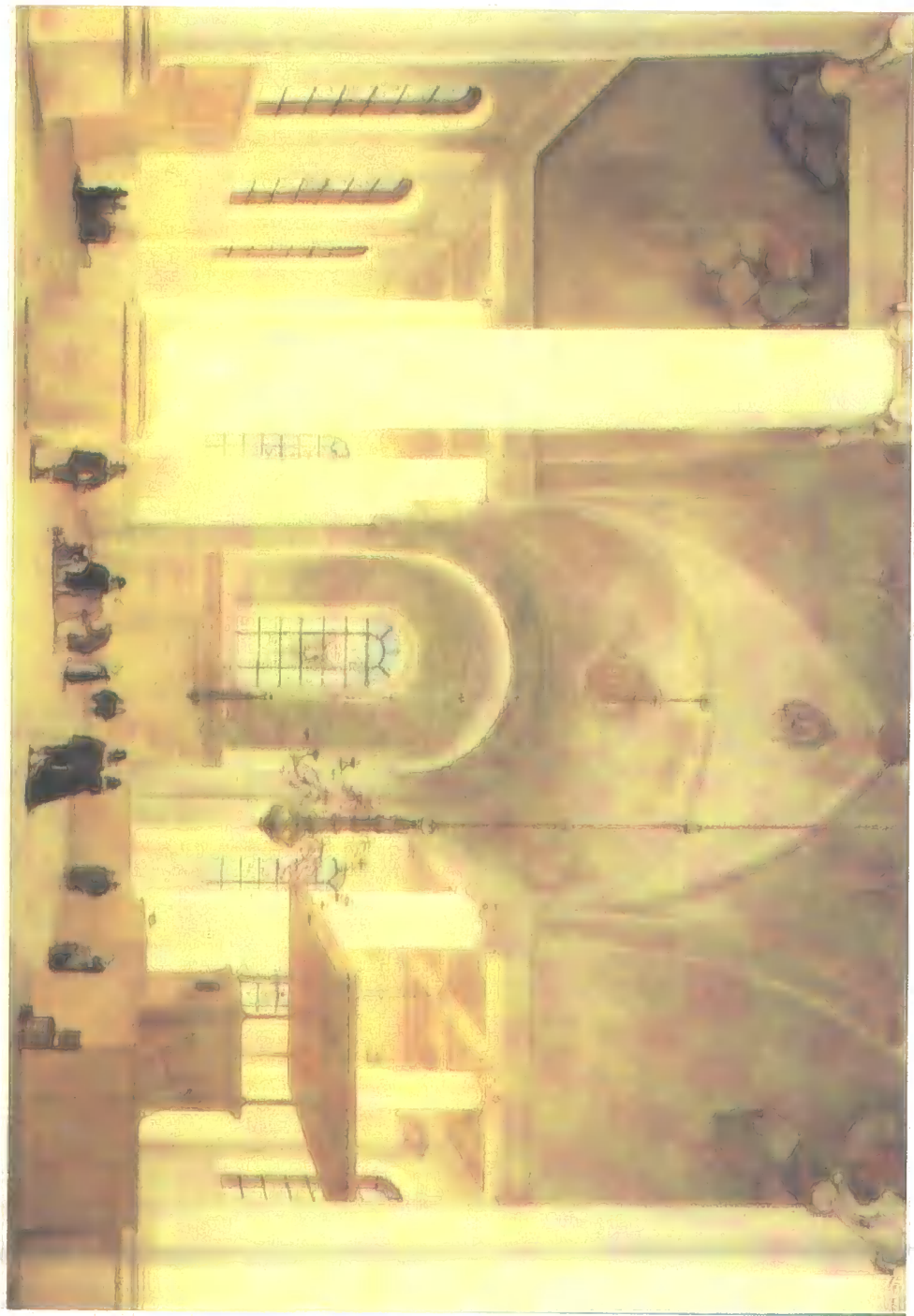


Plate 8



Plate 9



Plate 10



Plate 11



Plate 12



Plate 13



Plate 14



Plate 15



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